Body, Mind, and Affect:

Three Studies in Contemporary Animated Film

Dylan Davidson, B.A.

E 369H
Special Honors in the Department of English
Submitted to fulfill Plan II Honor Program thesis requirement
The University of Texas at Austin

May 2017

Professor Donna Kornhaber
Department of English
Supervising Faculty

Professor Heather Houser
Department of English
Second Reader

Abstract

Author: Dylan Davidson

Title: Body, Mind, and Affect: Three Studies in Contemporary Animated Film

Supervising Professors: Donna Kornhaber (English), Heather Houser (English)

The complete representational freedom afforded by animation has long made it the site of slippages between visual strategies that prioritize "exterior" and "interior" notions of reality. This capacity to balance "mimetic" and "abstract" impulses harmonizes with the flexible methodologies recently developed by affect theory, whose investigations of disparate notions of "feeling" have foregrounded subjects that evade neat linguistic apprehension. This thesis argues that affect and animation fulfill and enrich one another, emphasizing their shared fascination with issues of cognition, embodiment and subjectivity. Pixar's *Inside Out* (2015), Charlie Kaufman and Duke Johnson's *Anomalisa* (2015), and Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away* (2001) substantiate these resonances, using animation's depictive fluidity to engage with pressing theoretical questions: affect's imperfect methodological rigidity, the co-constitutive "circuit" that commingles body and mind, and the influence of received aesthetic values on our subjective interpretation of affective phenomena. Together, these films demonstrate how interweaving the vocabularies of animation and affect provides new ways of sorting out where "feelings" come from and how we ought to engage with them.

For Martha

Acknowledgements

I could not have produced this thesis without the help of the professors who have given me guidance and feedback throughout the very long process of its composition, whether that entailed sitting through my elevator pitch, helping me refine my language, or posing challenging questions. For this I'd like to thank Jerome Bump, James Loehlin, Elizabeth McCracken, Peter LaSalle, Alan Friedman, John Ruszkiewicz, Hervé Picherit, Paola Bonifazio, Kirsten Cather, Cole Hutchison, Sam Baker, Liz Cullingford, Allen MacDuffie, Martha Newman, and particularly Mia Carter. Every conversation mattered. Thank you for listening.

For four years now, I have been stunned by the constant care, attention and support of the Department of English, especially in my interactions with Brad Humphries. It is impossible to overstate Brad's kindness, patience and unfailing eagerness to help the students he serves.

Much of the composition of this project happened in conversations with friends and loved ones, with varying degrees of familiarity with my topic. Some of these conversations were frustrated, some discouraged, some ecstatic. But I always felt heard and loved. Sarah, Holly, Mitch, Aidan, Hayden, Valerie, Kate, Kenzie, Fred, David, Deborah: Every day I am glad to be alive, here and now, because of you.

(My thanks also to Sandra Dee, a blind cat who rubbed her face on my laptop while I composed some of the most challenging portions of the thesis.)

Mom, Dad, Jack: Thanks for putting up with it all.

The involvement of Heather Houser and Donna Kornhaber in this project goes far beyond what any faculty member could be expected to contribute to an individual student's personal or academic growth. Not only do I not know what this thesis would be without them—I don't know who *I* would be.

Thank you, Heather, for hearing me.

Thank you, Donna, for believing in me.

Table of Contents

*

Introduction:
Animation's Affective Resonances

After all these implements and texts designed by intellects
So vexed to find, evidently, there's still so much that hides.
– The Shins

*

Around midway through Isao Takahata's *Tale of the Princess Kaguya* (2013), the film momentarily falls apart. Kaguya, a beautiful young princess from the moon who is discovered and raised by Japanese peasant farmers, cracks beneath the pressure to conform to traditional gender roles. Unwilling to remove her eyebrows, to blacken her teeth, to sit motionless at the feet of her wealthy suitors, she runs away from home. She charges across a monochromatic landscape, shedding the half-dozen brightly colored kimonos she wore out of deference to her parents, racing at breakneck speed toward the woods.

The film keeps pace with the sprinting princess—but only just barely. The "camera" follows a jagged path alongside her, mimicking the bumpy and frequently chaotic motions of handheld live-action cinematography. Meanwhile, as Kaguya presses further into the woods, the images themselves begin to break down: Kaguya is rendered as a pair of red and black smudges that *suggest* the image of a running girl, while the landscape around her becomes rough and sketchy (fig. 1). Tree trunks and shadows are represented by rugged horizontal scribbles, and sharp vertical brushstrokes indicate stalks of tall grass. Takahata's decision to go "outside the lines" in this sequence neatly metaphorizes Kaguya's break with the stifling formality of her unrequested lifestyle, but it also heightens the emotional impact of her decision to run away. The chaotic motion of Kaguya's inky surroundings, the dissolving lines of her own body, the rawness and urgency of forms breaking down into shaggy, storyboard-like sketches—these exterior

details reflect Kaguya's interior landscape. The film transposes the subjective *feeling* of her flight onto the observable *forms* of the world around her.


Figs. 1 & 2: Princess Kaguya's stylistic breakdown

As the fast pace and ragged energy of its changing style suggest, the breakdown sequence is the emotional climax of Takahata's film, a breaking point in Kaguya's internal struggle to cope with the pressure of her parents' overbearing expectations. In a moment of narrative crisis, the fraying rawness of her interior state transposes itself onto the film's images. Emotions, Kaguya demonstrates, have a way of making their way from "inside" our minds "out" into the world, of coloring our perceptions of and responses to our external circumstances. But recent scholarship on the subject has also emphasized how emotion—or rather *affect*—can move in the other direction: from the "outside" "in."

To this end, entire schools of theory and philosophy have cropped up around the idea of "reclaiming" the body, long designated as at best ancillary and at worst a distraction to the rational mind, for its critical productivity. Theorists such as Brian Massumi have picked through the dense writings of philosophers like Spinoza, Nietzsche, Bergson and Deleuze, arriving at the idea that *affect*, an ineffable, dispositional dimension of being-in-the-world, must be thought to reside in the body, the *real* site of our interactions with the objects, forces, intensities and flows that constitute the world around us. All of this vocabularizing (words like "intensity," "flow," and even "object" have all taken on new and very specific meanings in recent scholarship) has

given affect theory a steep and occasionally frustrating learning curve. But it also demonstrates how reconsidering the links between body and mind has provided the groundwork for a new and rapidly expanding branch of criticism.

Since the mid-1990s, affect theories have proliferated widely—and are by no means unified in their aims and principles.[1] Generally speaking, the major break has been between two camps: cognitivists and corporealists. The former group argues that it's possible to integrate affect and the body into the critical conversation while maintaining a certain "inside-out directionality."[2] These writings are often based on the work of psychologists like Silvan Tomkins and Paul Ekman, who followed in Darwin's footsteps in looking at observable physiological behaviors to determine how interior states are expressed (literally "pressed out").[3] Cognitivists look for the mechanisms that propel emotion's "inside-out" movement; as Tomkins put it, "Darwin [in studying facial cues to determine subjects' emotional states] thought there was something being *expressed*. What he saw wasn't *it*."[4]

Corporealists, on the other hand, tend to take a body-first approach that either rejects or is unconcerned with the mind's ability to comprehend or express the experiences of the senses. In Massumi's view, the categorical emotions (joy, sadness, anger, fear, disgust, and surprise) that Darwin enumerated in *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals* (and which were later reformulated by Silvan Tomkins) are only the knotted outcroppings of affects that "double over"

[1] Alexa Weik von Mossner identifies and outlines phenomenological, cognitivist, political, and audience-response perspectives. See *Moving Environments: Affect, Emotion, Ecology, and Film* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2014), 6-8.

[2] Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth, "An Inventory of Shimmers," in *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 6.

[3] See Tomkins, *Affect Imagery Consciousness*, 4 vols. (New York: Springer, 1962-92), and Ekman, *Emotion in the Human Face* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1972).

[4] Silvan Tomkins, "Inverse Archaeology: Facial Affect and the Interfaces of Scripts Within and Between Persons," in *Exploring Affect* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 285.

themselves and rise to the surface level of linguistic apprehension.[5] That is, while some affects accrue enough complexity and immediacy that we can identify them with language, these are hardly the only embodied phenomena that arise out of our interactions with the world. As card-carrying poststructuralists, theorists like Massumi tend to emphasize the underlying philosophical principles that motivate their claims: "The aim [in focusing on the body]," Massumi writes, "was to put matter unmediatedly back into cultural materialism, along with what seemed most directly corporeal back into the body."[6] Massumi's use of the prepositional phrase "back into" illustrates how he sees the fluidity of bodily affect as a way to reaffirm his commitment to materialism.

It's all a bit baroque, but the vigorous debate among theorists who fit under the broad umbrella of "affect" shows how quickly a critical interest in "feelings" opens up into a lively and at times dizzyingly complex theoretical discourse—one that seems to encompass everything, that is unnerving in its comfort with the shortcomings of language. As Eric Shouse writes, "the body has a grammar of its own that cannot be fully captured in language."[7] At the very least, affect theorists' propensity to level bold claims like Shouse's demonstrate its capacity to shake up old conversations. It's contemporary. It's exciting. Affect is where the action is. And as we'll see, it's where animation has been all along.

*

If the shifting forms in Kaguya's breakdown sequence hinted at the directional ambiguities that motivate ongoing discussions in affect theory, they also demonstrate key representational compromises inherent to animation. In one sense, the scene's gradual

[5] Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual* (Durham, NC: 2002), 31. Hereafter designated *PV*.

[6] Ibid., 4.

[7] Eric Shouse, "Feeling, Emotion, Affect," in *M/C Journal* 8.6 (2005).

decomposition of the frame presents a microcosm of a decades-long transition in its director's visual style. After the meticulous realism of his neorealist masterpiece *Grave of the Fireflies* (1988), Takahata started to experiment: whereas before this period he used diegetic justifications like a dark tunnel to narrow the frame and direct the viewer's eye (fig. 3), with 1991's *Only Yesterday* Takahata began to strip away details throughout the frame to create daringly spare and minimalistic compositions (fig. 4). Two decades later, *Tale of the Princess Kaguya* continues this pattern; in the style of traditional Japanese prints, the film is full of blank space, modest charcoal linework, and restrained watercolors.

Fig. 3: *Grave of the Fireflies*, and **Fig. 4:** *Only Yesterday*

Takahata's changing visual style (across both his career and the scene from *Kaguya*) demonstrates two of animation's defining qualities: malleability and selectivity. Though theorists have only recently given serious, straight-faced attention to the medium, every animation scholar worth his salt is familiar with Sergei Eisenstein's concept of "plasmaticness." Eisenstein was delighted with the "rubber hose" quality of the characters in Walt Disney's *Silly Symphonies* cartoons, noting in characteristically heady prose how their flexible bodies "[allow] representational forms to behave as a non-volitional play of free lines and surfaces."[8] That is,

[8] Sergei Eisenstein, *Eisenstein on Disney*, ed. Jay Leyda, (London: Heinemann, 1989), 99. Scott Bukatman suggests that "all scholarly articles on animation are required to cite this work" (he's right).

"representational forms" like a cartoon skeleton's limbs can be as flexible and "playful" as an animator wishes—she can make the film's "free lines and surfaces" do whatever she likes.

In the writings of animation scholars since Eisenstein, "plasmaticness" has come to represent animation's complete representational freedom and its fundamental affinity for change; an animator can draw (or sculpt, or program) whatever she wants into the frame—anything at all. Animation theorist Paul Wells makes much of this total control of the screen space inherent to animation, arguing that

> animation's very language collapses structural fixities and known frameworks, and fundamentally is especially responsive to, and expressive of, change. More than any other means of creative expression animation embodies a simultaneity of (creatively) re-constructing the order of things at the very moment of critically deconstructing them.[9]

Wells' emphasis on simultaneity and his bold claims about the "very language" of animation are characteristic of his work to reclaim the medium as a high art form deserving of serious critical inquiry: "Animation," he writes, "is the very language of the Modernist principle," of the imperative to stretch our representational capacity and "make it new."[10] Wells is without doubt the most authoritative voice in contemporary animation scholarship. In particular, his book *Animation and America* (2002) lays out a comprehensive history, vocabulary, and theory of animation, structuring the conversation for recent scholars like Ursula Heise, Scott Bukatman, and Karen Beckman—over a decade before animation caught their eyes.

With Wells' assertion of animation's malleable mise en scène (i.e., the freedom to manipulate literally everything in the frame) arises the medium's second defining characteristic: an imperative to make representational decisions that *constrain* this visual limitlessness. Because

---

[9] Paul Wells, *Animation and America* (Newark, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 16-17. Hereafter designated *AA*.

[10] Ibid.

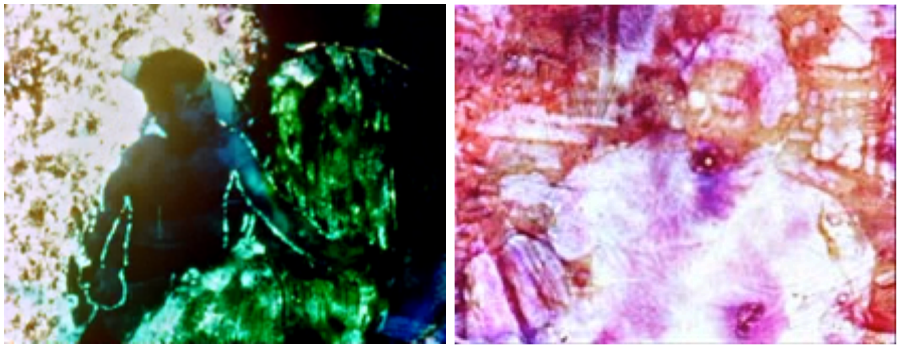
nothing in an animated film draws itself, every diegetic element must be a deliberate choice. As Maureen Furniss writes, animators continually place themselves along a continuum between "mimesis" and "abstraction."[11] Furniss neatly captures how animation allows artists to create images that approximate "reality" as we experience it as well as more expressionistic renderings—as in *The Tale of the Princess Kaguya*—that visualize how something *feels*. As we'll see, mimesis and abstraction aren't mutually exclusive categories, but it's useful to think of a push and pull between different visual commitments: on the one hand animation's capacity to approximate recognizable forms, and on the other its ability to transmute those forms into something subjective and interior.

So while it's not a zero-sum relationship, animators (particularly those who make narrative films) often sacrifice the abstract capacity of the medium in favor of creating recognizable and viewer-friendly forms. This tradeoff is evident in *Kaguya*'s breakdown sequence, whose brief expressionism is particularly effective precisely because it appears to threaten the stability of the film itself. As I'll show in my chapter on *Inside Out*, animators often pragmatically circumscribe the medium's plasmatic potential in order to maintain a stylistic consistency that enables their films to be *about* something in a way that a wide audience can understand. Likewise, abstract animators who veer from mimesis often sacrifice narrative potential in the name of representing complex and very particular interior processes and feelings.

Stan Brakhage's *Eye Myth* (1957) illustrates these tradeoffs, foregrounding animation's fixation with the relay between internal and external realities. *Eye Myth* is a nine-second-long silent film, which famously took Brakhage a year to complete; he painted every image directly onto all 216 frames of sixteen-millimeter celluloid. The film is a rapid wash of multicolored abstract paintings, grouped roughly by shape and hue (the first second is mostly gold and orange

[11] Maureen Furniss, *Animation Aesthetics: Art in Motion* (London: John Libbey, 1998), 6.

images, followed by a flood of green and blue and black, and so forth). Aside from a few fleeting images that resemble human figures, there's very little in the way of mimesis: there's no traditional narrative, no characters, no clearly articulated thesis.



Figs. 5 & 6: Humanlike forms in Brakhage's *Eye Myth*

Rather, to the extent that *Eye Myth* can be interpreted, it thrusts this task upon the viewer; its fleeting moments of representational continuity highlight our need to "make sense" of the film. By directing our attention to our own turning gears, Brakhage defamiliarizes and de-automates the cognitive process, reducing ordered perceptions to their sensory data and pointing our focus to the site of our interaction with the world (in this case, our eyes) and forcing us to observe our own interpretive machinery. So if the film is "about" anything, it may well be about the experience of watching it. Abstract animation frequently requires this sort of tentative interpretive language, in which we talk about what a film "may" mean, "if" it means anything at all. To be frank, experimental animation's tendency to deny convenient interpretive footholds is probably why almost nobody watches it.[12] But films like Brakhage's *Eye Myth* usefully demonstrate the slipperiness of forms that hew toward a-linguistic or interior truths—a potential that, as *Kaguya* demonstrates, is always latent in an animated film.

Regardless of what *Eye Myth* is or isn't "about," it at least demonstrates animation's capacity to map out the relationship between the senses and the mind. Brakhage's brief, non-

[12] There are also, of course, economic factors. These films don't come out of studios with a vested interest in turning a profit.

narrative flood of colors and shapes highlights the notion that "experience" is a joint effort between the physical process of sensation and the cognitive process of perception. With this in mind, *Eye Myth*'s particular balance between mimesis and abstraction might represent some intermediary place in the body-mind "circuit" (a concept I'll be exploring in my chapter on *Anomalisa*) where raw optical data hasn't quite been structured into a recognizable image. This interpretation is (necessarily, as we've seen) a bit conjectural, but it demonstrates animation's unique ability to situate itself on an axis between external and internal "truths"; that is, between truth to *form* and truth to *feeling.* As Wells sees it, this potential for stylistic shifts enables animation to "captur[e] the oscillation between interior and exterior states."[13] As I'll discuss in subsequent chapters, this "oscillatory" quality is another key feature of animation—one that puts a foot in the door for the same kinds of questions that motivate affect theorists.

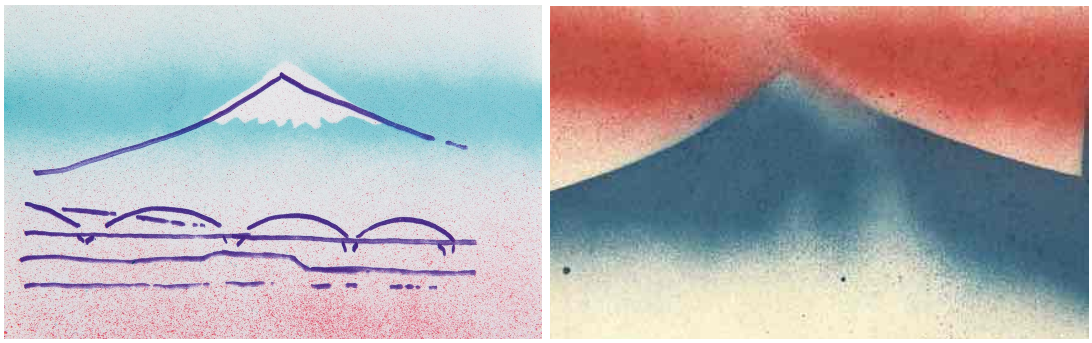
Brakhage's expressionistic depiction of a half-processed perception (an "eye myth") exemplifies the "in-between" quality that is at once afforded and necessitated by animation's complete visual freedom. This capacity to shift between depictive strategies resonates with the peculiar methodology of a great deal of affect theory, which thrives in rarefied "bloom-spaces" that complicate clean divisions between sensation, cognition, and emotion.[14] In their bird's-eye-view summary of affect theory, Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth use this term to describe places where once-overlooked interstices between rigid elements of discourse expand or "bloom" into sites of surprising critical productivity. But "bloom space" might also describe the plasmatic world of animation itself, a place where the relationship between "inside" and "out" is as malleable as an animator's capacity to think up an image.

---

[13] Wells, *AA*, 7.

[14] Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth, "An Inventory of Shimmers," in *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), 9.

For both animators and affect theorists, then, ambiguities and blurred boundaries are an asset, rather than a hindrance. By Gregg and Seigworth's account, "a great many theories of affect do not sweat the construction of any elaborate step-by-step methodology much at all, but rather come to fret the presentation or the style of presentation, the style of being present, more than anything else."[15] Like animators' freedom to shift between visual commitments through conscious acts of stylistic circumscription, affect methodology frequently entails knowingly "trying on" imperfect or inconcrete perspectives as a way of engaging subjects that resist rigid intellectual taxonomies and demand a certain "style of being present." In this sense, animation and affect share a propensity for knowingly "dipping into" provisional concepts and strategies. In *Eye Myth*, for example, the rapid flow of abstract images coalesces for fractions of a second around a pair of silhouettes.



Figs. 7 & 8: Momentary linework in Robert Breer's *Fuji*

But this methodological push and pull is perhaps best exemplified by the work of experimental animator Robert Breer, who spent half a century exploring the mechanisms of continuity and perception that mediate our experience of cinema. Breer's method of "abstraction" is to pull apart the concrete components of his films, separating outlines, shapes and colors into diegetic elements that behave of their own accord. Breer veers toward reduction, using a bare minimum of occasional detail to suggest ordered, recognizable forms among his

[15] Ibid., 14.

abstract images. In *Fuji* (1974), for example, he depicts the view from the window of a train in Japan with a shifting style that only sporadically uses lines (figs. 7 & 8). The eponymous mountain fluctuates from a distinct image of a specific place in time to a blend of shapes and colors that suggests something more subjective. Punctuating abstraction with mimesis, Breer uses animation's capacity to dip into a more structured visual strategy in order to guide the viewer's perception of the images—and also, occasionally, to take away the guard rail.

*

Animation and affect resonate in their spectacular resistance to structural rigidities. As the fluctuating visual strategies of Isao Takahata, Stan Brakhage and Robert Breer demonstrate, animation's defining formal features—its complete representational freedom as well as the consequent imperative to constrain that freedom—align it with the mindfully tentative methodologies of theorists who investigate the ambiguous origins and functions of "feeling." Undeterred by the potentially ineffable implications of their investigations into matters of cognition, embodiment and subjectivity, affect scholars have devised new and deliberately inconcrete strategies for textual analysis, and in doing so have challenged the utility of concreteness in the first place. This thesis argues they have also inadvertently created a vocabulary to describe what animation has been doing all along.

In my three studies of contemporary animated films, I'll show how the emerging disciplines of affect theory and animation studies fulfill and enrich one another, allowing us to think about structure-defying questions of embodiment, subjectivity, and feeling in new ways. Existing scholarship has yet to call attention to these homologies: no one has yet pointed out in contemporary theoretical terms just how animation connects disparate notions of "feeling" that involve the mind and the body; nor has any scholar recognized the way that animation fulfills

Massumi's call for forms that "part company with the linguistic model [...] and find a semiotics willing to engage with continuity."[16] As Wells might say, animation is the "very language" of continuity, not just as a temporally extended art form, but in its constant rearticulation of its own formal fluidity and potential for transformation. Viewing animation through the lens of affect theory lends new significance to animation's propensity for change, yielding productive insights into age-old questions about the relationship between body, mind and emotion: Where do "feelings" come from? How do they color and/or constitute our understanding of the world? And how can we incorporate this knowledge into our day-to-day lives? Likewise, animation visually instantiates concepts that affect theorists have been describing for decades, and has the potential to change the way we conceptualize "feeling" and "thinking" and the connections between them.

In this introduction, I've argued for the validity of intermingling affect theory and animation studies by illustrating their "resonant" fixations with questions of embodiment and subjectivity and feeling. Across the three extended analyses that make up the rest of the thesis, I'll demonstrate how animation plays out these resonances while commenting on and at times correcting the shortcomings of different approaches to affect.

Pixar's *Inside Out* (2015) exemplifies the tradeoff between mimesis and abstraction, demonstrating the way that animators adopt stylistic constraints in the name of narrative clarity. By visualizing the "inside" of the mind using color-coded characters and visual motifs of construction and industry, *Inside Out* takes a decidedly cognitivist approach to affect, relegating the body to an ill-defined space below the head. Yet the film also anticipates its critics by narrativizing a challenge to its own structure-bound approach, ultimately accounting for its conceptual shortcomings by self-consciously adjusting its structuring principles. In this way,

[16] Massumi, *PV*, 4.

Inside Out demonstrates the value of provisional or "attenuable" strategies for theorizing and representing affect.

Charlie Kaufman and Duke Johnson's stop-motion film *Anomalisa* (2015) offers a counterpoint to *Inside Out*'s tentative engagement with the body. Through cinematographic slippages between subjective and objective perspectives, the film visualizes the conceptual ambiguities that motivate scholarship on affect and demonstrates the negative consequences of solipsistic residence in the head. By muddying the distinction between third- and first-person points of view and foregrounding the inherent artificiality of its own stop-motion technique, *Anomalisa* demonstrates animation's capacity to complicate clean divisions between interior and exterior, illustrating the theoretical and interpersonal imperative for an affective "circuit" in which body and mind meet and blend.

Finally, Hayao Miyazaki's hand-drawn *anime* masterpiece *Spirited Away* (2001) builds on *Anomalisa*'s assertion of the importance of materiality, revealing how sensory engagements and the affects they generate are codified by received aesthetic values. Through its narrative of personal empowerment in the face of aesthetically inflected fear and disgust, *Spirited Away* critiques aesthetic theories that link physical excesses and moral failings and points toward an interpretive paradigm with a more positive and theoretically sound view of the body and the innumerable forms it takes.

Together, these films demonstrate the utility and thrill of intermingling the vocabularies of affect and animation. In their own ways, they build on the homologies I have demonstrated here, illustrating the necessity of corporeal engagement in understanding and experiencing affect. By reconciling and interlacing disparate notions of "feeling," they point to new ways of thinking about bodies and cognition and feelings both in cinematic texts and in our own lives.

Mixed Emotions:
Inside Out's Case for Malleable Categories

After returning from a trip to Europe in 1953, Walt Disney was infuriated to discover that his animators had created an "experimental" film in his absence. Full of expressionistic character drawings and non-figurative background paintings, *Toot, Whistle, Plunk and Boom* used the hip, colorful aesthetic of modern design to create a jazzy and fast-paced history of music. The film was enormously well received, winning that year's Oscar for best animated short, but Disney was nevertheless horrified at director Ward Kimball's flagrant departure from the company's decades-old house style. Biographer Marc Eliot writes that "Walt explicitly banned all further stylistic experimentation by any animator and limited Kimball's participation in future film productions."[1]

Kimball should have seen this censure coming. By that time, Disney's vehement refusal to embrace the abstract forms that had entered the imagination of contemporary visual art was well-documented: his refusal to entertain the possibility of formal experimentation had led to the formation of UPA, a production company made up largely of animators who had left Disney Studios during a strike in 1941. Beginning around 1950, UPA became a serious competitor for the Academy Award for Best Animated Short Film—and in fact, Kimball's win in 1953 was the first time a Disney film had been awarded the prize since the studio's 1942 propaganda film *Der Fuehrer's Face* [*sic*]. Nevertheless, Disney persisted in demanding an essentially realist style of his animators through the 1950s and 60s, an imperative that has persisted throughout the studio's history. In the twenty-first century, Disney's photorealist legacy has been delicately and

[1] Marc Eliot, *Walt Disney: Hollywood's Dark Prince* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1994), 218.

innovatively preserved by the animators at Pixar Studios. In their collaborative, industrial approach to the medium, Pixar mimics Disney's story-first approach, which since the 1930s has divided artistic authorship across dozens or even hundreds of individual laborers.

All of this emphasis on realism makes *Inside Out* (2015) an oddity for Pixar. While many of their films offer fantastic and imaginative worlds, they all essentially behave, in a sense, like the one that *we* live in: toys come to life, Monsters work in factories, anthropomorphized vehicles drive themselves around racetracks. *Inside Out* travels inside the mind, adopting a visual style predicated almost entirely on metaphor to represent the emotional developments of an eleven-year-old girl whose family moves to San Francisco from her Midwestern hometown.

As I argued in my introduction, animation's limitless visual capacity, as well as the imperative to adopt strategies that constrain it, align the medium with the deliberately tentative critical mode of affect theory. Pixar's approach to representing consciousness in *Inside Out* exemplifies these necessary tradeoffs, using animation's pliability to create a system of crisp, intuitive visual metaphors at the cost of the medium's more expressionistic capacities. This emphasis on structures and categories, along with the film's distinct separation between "Inside" and "Out," aligns it with dualistic, cognitivist theories of affect that formulate the mind as a "headquarters" that processes the body's ancillary sensory experiences. But *Inside Out* girds itself against criticism on these terms by incorporating the shortcomings of its own categorical structures into its narrative, suggesting a big-picture perspective that values adaptability over the specific dictates of any individual paradigm for understanding emotion.

Inside Out is as much a film about rules as it is about feelings. Its narrative, right from the moment of its protagonist's birth, comprises a spectacular yet methodical enunciation of the principles that structure the film's diegesis. The movie begins with a slow fade into a shot of a

newborn Riley blinking awake in her parents' arms, atop a voiceover asking, "Do you ever look at someone and wonder, *what is going on inside their head*?" Shallow-focused and drenched in soft white light, the opening image is an impressionistic—if nevertheless photorealistic—representation of the first moments of human life (fig. 1).


Fig. 1: The opening shot of Riley, and **Fig. 2:** Joy and Sadness operate Riley's "controls" early in the film

But the opening shot doesn't linger. The moment Riley opens her eyes, the camera zooms at a rapid pace through what is presumably her optical nerve (visualized as a rapid tunnel-like procession of blue lights), to a dark, evaporative space. In the middle of the frame, a yellow light glows with increasing intensity as a brightly colored figure materializes. She blinks awake, echoing Riley's expression from moments before, and begins to walk forward. She sees Riley's parents on an enormous "screen" that floats in the vaguely defined space above her head. Looking back down at her feet, Joy discovers a white panel with an enormous button; when she presses it, Riley laughs. Immediately the camera pulls back through Riley's eyes to the Outside world, creating an artificial match-cut from a shot of Joy at the "control panel" to a shot of Riley giggling in her parents' arms.

As is the case for many of Pixar's frequently high-concept films, *Inside Out*'s inventive opening sequence self-consciously takes on the task of articulating the basis parameters of its

world.[2] First and foremost, its alternating narrative principle establishes the "Inside" and "Outside" realms that will simultaneously constitute Riley's experience—a dualistic, parallel structure that serves as the bedrock for the rest of the story. In the Outside world, Riley interacts with her parents, goes to school, plays hockey, and otherwise lives her life; Inside, a team of Emotions[3] operates the "control panel" that modulates her reactions to her external circumstances.

The first time Riley cries, Joy looks away from the screen to discover a short blue character at the control panel: Sadness (fig. 2). When Riley's parents try to feed her a forkful of broccoli, Disgust takes the controls and makes her turn away with revulsion. When they threaten to take away her dessert, Anger steps in. The Emotions' use of a control panel illustrates how the title "Inside Out" identifies both the film's central narrative conceit and its theory of how affect determines the relations between subject and world: literally "at the controls," Riley's feelings illustrate the "outward movement" denoted by the etymology of the word "emotion."[4] The Emotions internally process Riley's material circumstances, and their reactions are transposed to the Outside world through the mechanistic operation of her body. Gregg and Seigworth identify this perspective in their taxonomy of affect theories as as one which views emotion as "the prime 'interest' motivator that comes to put the *drive* in bodily drives."[5]

---

[2] Think of the opening "town hall" that gets cut short at the beginning *Toy Story*, forcing the characters to "play dead" on the floor of Andy's room; or the *in medias res* "scaring" sequence of *Monsters, Inc.*, in which a diffident monster-in-training tries and fails to frighten an animatronic child.

[3] Capitalized here and throughout to distinguish the film's characters from "emotions" writ-large.

[4] "emotion, n." OED Online. December 2016. Oxford University Press. From Latin *e-movere*, literally "to move outward."

[5] Gregg and Seigworth, "An Inventory of Shimmers," 6. My italics. Gregg and Seigworth themselves contrast this kind of theory from the body-first ideas of Deleuze and Massumi on account of "a certain inside-out/outside-in difference in directionality" (ibid).

If Inside emotions "drive" the cognitive processes that determine Riley's Outside interactions with and reactions to the world, it makes sense that the film imagines their control room as the central "Headquarters" for an enormous structure of memory and personality that develops outward as Riley grows and matures. The opening sequence goes on to show how each interaction between an emotion and the outside world produces a glowing orb—a memory—that rolls along a pair of rails into the mind's machinery. The first time this happens, Joy watches in wonder as a gold ball containing an image of Riley's parents rolls out from beside the "screen" and into a series of brightly-colored gears and whirligigs that instantly materialize out of the dark, undifferentiated space of her infant mind.

The film's Rube Goldberg-esque memory system is the first instance of a series of mechanical and architectural metaphors, images of *structuring* that outline the basic principles of *Inside Out*'s use of the medium. As Riley grows older, the Inside space of her mind develops into a sprawling network of buildings and infrastructures. Her personality is represented by a handful of "islands," floating factories that churn mechanistically on the horizon, while her "memory archive" is maintained by hard-hatted, east-coast-accented workers who use vacuum-operated machines to dispose of old experiences and send pertinent ones to the head (fig. 3). All the while, a literal "train of thought" snakes through the sky, transporting information throughout the mind.

If part of the aim of the film is, as Joy suggests in her opening voiceover, to explain "what is going on inside [someone's] head"—that is, to show how the mind *works—Inside Out*'s emphasis on processes of production resonates with its self-conscious effort to enunciate its own rules. To this end, the film is full of lighthearted industrial metaphors that explain the origins of thoughts and behaviors, like a mischievous memory worker who explains how he likes to send a

catchy commercial jingle up to headquarters "for no reason" as a way to make his job more interesting. This playful didacticism is the primary mode of the "structuring" sequences that comprise the opening of the film, and the engine of its effort to transplant emotion from the film's subtext to its diegesis.

If part of the film's project is a didactic translation of abstract concepts into concrete and comprehensible images, metaphor predictably plays a fundamental role in its visual logic. Facts and opinions are represented as near-indistinguishable mahjong tiles. An overzealous lick of ice cream envelops the control room in a sheet of ice—a literal "brain freeze." But the most crucial example is the film's character design, which links shape, size, gesture, and color symbolism to represent emotions with a neat system of visual shorthand. Joy is tall and yellow, constantly smiling, and twirls around Riley's head making suggestions while she directs the other Emotions. Sadness, by contrast, is short, blue and rounded; she shuffles from place to place and moves indecisively. Anger is stout, angular and red; he moves in short, jerky strides and blows fire from the top of his head when angry. Fear is purple, skinny, and skittish; Disgust green, dismissive, fashionably dressed. These characters code the film by shape and color, particularly sequences involving the "memory orbs" that they produce when they take control of Riley's mind. For all of Riley's childhood, the color-coded Inside characters sort out Riley's experiences, hoping to produces as many yellow (joyful) orbs as possible; in this sense, the Emotions themselves use the film's visual shorthand as a way of processing and assessing the quality of Riley's life—a measure of how well they're "doing their job"—a job that is placed

under new and unfamiliar stresses when Riley's family moves from her childhood home in Minnesota to San Francisco.[6]

Inside Out's didactic impulse, its motifs of mechanization and productivity, and its crisp structures of visual metaphor all demonstrate the filmmakers' use of animation for ordering and heuristic-building. This emphasis on comprehensibility contrasts Paul Wells' account of the chaotic, destabilizing potential of the medium. Whereas *Inside Out* seeks to elucidate the rules and structuring principles of the mind, Wells tellingly titles the introduction to *Animation in America* "Abdicating All Mental Law," arguing that animation's defining feature is its ability "to *question* and *challenge* the received knowledges which govern the physical laws and normative socio-cultural orthodoxies of the 'real world.'"[7] *Inside Out* does just the opposite, metaphorizing the "workings" of the mind using the forms of the observable world; though the film's ultimate goal is to show how emotions make their way from the "inside" "out," it does so by bringing representational structures—like trains, factories, and control panels—from the "outside" "in." In this way, it presents "the fragmentary processes of 'thought' itself" as not fragmentary at all, but rather as whole, completed, and unified.[8]

Wells would not be surprised at Pixar's use of this visual strategy. Just after the release of *Monsters, Inc.* (2001), he wrote that the studio's trademark style "heighten[s] the sense of realism until the form does not 'announce' itself as animation but insists upon its representational validity"; in other words, the studio's efforts have largely reflected the cutting edge of digital

[6] As I'll discuss later in the chapter, the film never really articulates how a non-joy emotion can simultaneously be committed to reacting to external circumstances *and* making sure Joy gets as much time at the controls as possible.

[7] Wells, *AA*, 5. My italics.

[8] Ibid., 7.

animation's potential to replicate "real life."[9] In 1995, computer-animated characters' skin looked like plastic, so Pixar made a film about toys. Since then, the sequence of their films has tended to reflect the studio's developing capacity to make things "look good": plastic (*Toy Story*), insect carapaces (*A Bug's Life*), a monster's fur (*Monsters, Inc.*), fish scales (*Finding Nemo*), and so on. Today, digital animation software often includes an artificial "camera" that filmmakers can program in deliberately analog terms: aperture, shutter speed, panning, tilting, et cetera.[10]

This sequential use of individual films as technological experiments with the ultimate goal of photorealism echoes Walt Disney's efforts throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s to make hand-drawn cartoons behave as closely as possible to films shot in live action. Casey Riffel points out how three key technologies contributed to this goal: the cel technique, which allowed animators to zero in on individual body parts to create realistic motion; *Steamboat Willy*'s use of sound synchronization, which made cartoons a truly audiovisual spectacle; and *The Old Mill*'s use of the multiplane camera, a photography rig that allowed animators to more accurately approximate three-dimensional space. These developments, Riffel argues, enabled the practice of "full animation," which Disney imbued with an "ideology of realism."[11] Wells, too, documents this process, arguing that Disney's strides toward photorealism and his keen market sensibility created a "Disney Effect" by which animation came to signify, in the popular imagination, a staid depiction of fantastical events rather than anything irreverent, chaotic, or abstract: "Disney

[9] Paul Wells, *Animation: Genre and Authorship* (London: Wallflower, 2002), 13.

[10] Pixar is understandably protective of the specifics of their software, which they refer to as "Marionette." But one imagines, based on credits in their films for roles like "camera direction" and "lighting direction," that it follows a live-action-modeled formula. See *Finding Dory* (2016).

[11] Casey Riffel, "Dissecting *Bambi*: Multiplanar Photography, the Cel Technique, and the Flowering of Full Animation," in *The Velvet Light Trap* 69 (Spring 2012), 3.

made animation a credible art-form, but simultaneously veiled the capacity of the form to more readily exhibit its subversive credentials."[12]

A crucial component of this development, in Wells' account, was the way that Disney's Fordist production system diffused artistic authorship across an "assembly line" of individual animators. Time and market demands required (and still require) multiple artists to work on various aspects of a film simultaneously: traditional roles include "key" animators, "in-betweeners," colorists, and background painters—not to mention writers, directors, producers and studio executives. In this sense, Disney's industrial model "denies the specificity of authorship and ideological coherence."[13]

Pixar's rigid story-first production model arguably continues this tradition of necessary fragmentation; according to the studio's co-founder and current president Ed Catmull, each film goes through dozens of revisions with a "braintrust" of directors and screenwriters who refine the script and storyboards for years before animation begins.[14] And just as the traditional animation process requires an assembly of various skills and expertises, the digital animation process necessitates experts in character design, compositing, camera, rigging, and shading—roles which often require specialization in separate pieces of software. It makes sense, then, for a film like *Inside Out* to visualize the mind as a complex system of interlaced productive infrastructures, to celebrate collaboration and the diffusion of individual control. So while Pixar follows in Disney's footsteps in adhering to "a model of animation which only partially use[s] its graphic

[12] Wells, *AA*, 45.

[13] Ibid., 42. Although this isn't to say that there's no "author" of a Disney film. Wells goes on to argue in *Animation: Genre and Authorship* that Disney's enormous influence as producer—an effective marshaller and marketer of creative elements—allowed him to develop a distinctive signature. As it were.

[14] Ed Catmull. "Inside the Pixar Braintrust." *Fast Company*. March 12, 2014. https://www.fastcompany.com/3027135/lessons-learned/inside-the-pixar-braintrust.

potential," it offers up in exchange a kind of heuristic spectacle, a system of visual categories and metaphor structures that promises to operate like a fine-tuned machine.[15]

Fig. 3: Riley's "personality islands," and **Fig. 4:** A memory displayed on the "screen" of her visual field

The film's structuring and category-making storytelling strategy, inflected by the collaborative effort required to unify its fragmentary production process, places considerable importance on vision. As the brief "optical tunnel" shots in the opening sequence demonstrates, the film theorizes Riley's eyes as the primary point of contact between the Outside and Inside worlds, the "screen" through which the Emotions "experience" the events of her life. Throughout the film, Inside characters use the idiom of the cinema to talk about the relation between Riley's experiences and their role in the process of cognition (fig. 4); when Riley falls asleep, a team of bean-shaped filmmakers begin shooting at "Dream Productions," a colorful reconstruction of a Hollywood sound stage. The dead-eyed director shouts at her crew members, "Remember, play to the camera, people. Riley *is* the camera." Tongue-in-cheek as the line may be, it is also a succinct description of the way the film theorizes the relation between "Inside" and "Out"; other than the occasional "brain freeze" joke, the film almost entirely neglects the senses of touch,

[15] Wells, *Animation: Genre and Authorship*, 9.

smell, taste, and sound. Like Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, Riley's life seems to consist mostly of "thought through [her] eyes."[16]

In this sense, *Inside Out* takes advantage of a centuries-old theoretical alignment between thought and sight. In her reclamation of the oral, tactile affect of disgust, Brinkema sardonically writes that "unlike the category-making, truth-approaching sense of vision, smell and taste are dismissed as senses that cannot discriminate or produce knowledge about the world."[17] It was this rejection of the "lower" senses, far from the head and associated with the body's boundaries and extremities, that necessitated an affective and aesthetic category predicated on the rejection of corporeal excess and the exclusion of intolerable forms.[18] Diatribes aside, Brinkema's point about the dismissal of the bodily senses calls attention to the fact that there doesn't seem to be much room for the non-visual (or the more-than-visual) in *Inside Out*'s meticulously color-coded interior world.

Brinkema's problematization of cognitivist aesthetic paradigms that privilege vision above the other senses makes for a pretty simple critique of *Inside Out*'s categorical approach to affect.[19] Because the film lacks a robust depiction of the function of the skin, the readers of Massumi might argue, its representational strategy falls short of accounting for affect's pre-cognitive "autonomy." I'll return to this line of thinking at the end of this chapter, but for the moment I'd like to consider the film's conceptual "shortcomings" as necessary consequences of its decision to theorize affect in the first place—an example of how, as I argued in the

[16] James Joyce, *Ulysses* (New York: Vintage, 1934), 37.

[17] Brinkema, *FA*, 121.

[18] A notion I'll be investigating with a great deal more scrutiny in my chapter on *Spirited Away*.

[19] And it fits right in with the host of recent methodologies that formulate affect as "that which eludes and is opposed to capital-T theory's _____-centric tendencies."

introduction, both animation and affect theory are not constrained but rather *defined* by mindful acts of self-limitation and thematic circumscription.

Resisting the instinct toward an interrogatory or "paranoid" reading of *Inside Out*'s categorical system reveals a subtle malleability in its adherence to the theoretical principles that inform it. The idea of a finite number of "basic emotions" is probably as old as categories themselves, but *Inside Out*'s formulation closely follows the system outlined by Darwin in *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872) and refined a century later by psychologist Paul Ekman in *Emotion in the Human Face* (1972). Both scientists based their theories on interpreting and categorizing facial expressions; they measured eyebrow angles, facial muscle contractions, the visibility of teeth. The outside-in "close reading" methodology of Darwin and Ekman, reading external forms as clues for cognitive structures, underscores their faith in the "interest motivator" theory of affect in which internal emotions are "ex-pressed" in response to a subject's physical circumstances. In the four decades since Ekman's book, he has become a leading figure in the psychology of emotion—to such an extent that *Inside Out*'s director Pete Docter sought him out for consultation on the script.[20] Docter clearly retains the most essential elements of Ekman's theory: the basic emotional categories of Joy, Sadness, Fear, Anger, and Disgust.[21] But his film also follows one of Ekman's more implicit premises—a system of spatial relations built on a clear distinction between "Inside" and "Out" in the first place.

This spatial separation, illustrated primarily by *Inside Out*'s back-and-forth editing strategy, literalizes Wells' idea that animation "captures the oscillation between interior and

[20] Dacher Keltner and Paul Ekman. "The Science Behind *Inside Out*." *The New York Times*. July 3, 2015. https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/05/opinion/sunday/the-science-of-inside-out.html.

[21] Ekman writes that his sixth basic emotion, surprise, was left out because Pixar's braintrust determined that the story could only "handle" the five characters that made it into the script (ibid.).

exterior states."[22] Wells often writes about animation in terms that emphasize its balance of multiple synchronous representational functions: it is both "extrapolated from, and interpretive of, observational and representational codings,"[23] and it "embodies a simultaneity of (creatively) re-constructing the order of things at the very moment of critically de-constructing them."[24] For all of Wells' emphasis on animation's synchronous "both/and" qualities, his description of animation's "oscillation" between Inside and Out foregrounds how easily "either/or" binarisms can come to inform spatial metaphors of subjecthood—a mode of representation that pretty neatly describes *Inside Out*'s visual strategy.

Wells would certainly contest this binaristic reading of his "oscillation" principle,[25] but I think it's a useful illustration of how *Inside Out*'s alternating story structure allows the film to play out in two places, at the expense of any coextensive space or action. For while the film is built on the premise that both the Inside and Outside narratives are happening "at once," the film's representational strategy precludes a simultaneous depiction of both worlds; the film only deviates from this back-and-forth editing principle during a handful of scenes in which the Emotions watch Riley's experiences on a screen, effectively reducing their agency to that of a passive observer.

This spatial and narrative separation between Inside and Outside is a defining characteristic of the film's use of animation. While the film depicts everything that happens in Riley's external life using Pixar's standard quasi-live-action cinematography, it reserves a freer

---

[22] Wells, *AA*, 7.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid., 17.

[25] That is, he would oppose a stringent focus on the word's "either/or" implications, and argue that this oscillation *constitutes*, rather than hinders, the mechanism of animation's simultaneous functions.

and more blatantly cartoonal vocabulary for interior passages; the effort to visualize Riley's mind allows Pixar's animators much more liberty in creating an abstract and plasmatic world. Before *Inside Out*, Pixar's only foray into what might be called "abstract" animation was a pair of shots in Brad Bird's *Ratatouille* (2007) in which the taste of food is visualized as swirling colors against a black background—and this effort was outsourced to a Canadian traditional animator.[26]

But going "Inside" allows Pixar's animators to "play up" their use of plasmatic forms, albeit in a strictly demarcated context. There is certainly precedent for this approach: in 1992's *Aladdin*, the Genie's magic gave Disney's animators a narrative justification to modulate the realistic "house style" and call upon the medium's cartoonal possibilities.[27] The Genie's introductory "Friend Like Me" sequence is full of instances of the "metamorphosis, synecdoche, and condensation" for their own sake that Wells sees as the medium's defining characteristics.[28] In one tellingly absurd shot, the Genie's face turns into a caricature of Jack Nicholson (fig. 5). The significance of this sequence is not so much the cartoon image of Nicholson as the representational freedom that it implies; the image, like many of the Genie's other transformations, was likely the result of the studio's uncharacteristically lenient decision to allow Robin Williams to ad-lib a number of his lines.[29]

---

[26] Michel Gagné. "Taste Visualization for Pixar's *Ratatouille*." *Gagne International*. 2007. http://www.gagneint.com/Final%20site/Animation/Pixar/Ratatouille.htm.

[27] There is probably a whole essay to be written about this film's complicated and flexible relationship with Disney realism and the broader history of American animation; I am indebted to an in-class lecture by Donna Kornhaber for this observation.

[28] Wells, *AA*, 13.

[29] *Diamond in the Rough: The Making of Aladdin* [*Aladdin* Platinum Edition, Disc 2]. (Burbank, CA: Disney Home Video, 2004), DVD.

This playful yet essentially constrained *ad libitum* sensibility also characterizes *Inside Out*'s approach to the visual distinction between its interior and exterior worlds. Though its imagery and metaphor structures are guided, as I argue, by recognizable external forms, the film's play with shape, color and character design nevertheless represents a clear modulation of the "stylized realism" that defines the studio's visual strategy. Still, just as the formal freedom of *Aladdin* requires and is ultimately delimited by the narrative conceit of magic, *Inside Out* marshals its more experimental visual passages with clear formal and narrative boundaries.

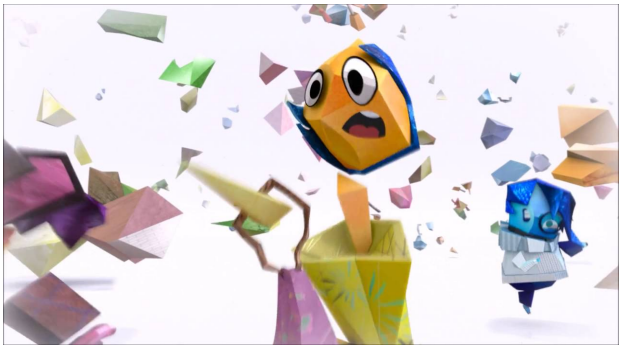
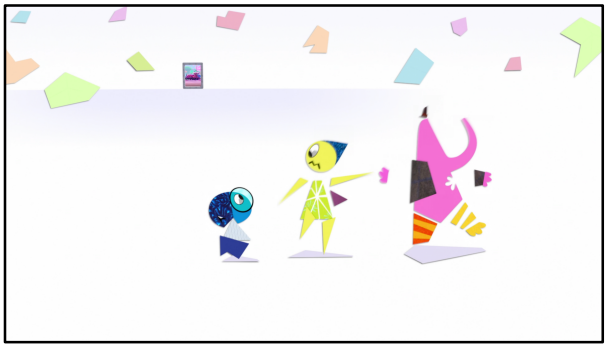



Fig. 5: *Aladdin*'s Genie transforms into Jack Nicholson, and **Fig. 6:** "Deconstructive fragmentation"

The clearest example of the film's "constrained freedom" is the sequence when Joy, Sadness and Riley's childhood imaginary friend Bing Bong visit the "abstract thought" section of Riley's mind. Keeping with the industrial motif of the film's metaphor system, the outside of Abstract Thought is depicted as an enormous warehouse, covered with metallic tubes and surrounded by machinery. Inside, however, is an enormous white room that expands in all directions and is filled with floating geometric shapes. In an abrupt change of animation style prompted by a mind-worker's decision to "turn on" Abstract Thought, Joy, Sadness and Bing Bong are transformed into cubistic three-dimensional structures that only vaguely retain the shapes of their original bodies. Sadness announces that she has "read about this in the manual," and that the first step of abstraction is "non-objective fragmentation" (fig. 6). Frightened by their sudden transfiguration, they immediately make for the exit.

But as they run toward the door, they are simplified even further, along lines that neatly correspond with animation's expressionistic capacities: in the "deconstruction" phase, the components of their bodies break apart and fall onto the floor; in the next phase, the screen literally compresses into a line down the middle of the frame and rotates, revealing a flat version of the three characters (fig. 7). Observing their second transformation, Sadness exclaims "Oh no! We're two dimensional!" and exhorts her companions to "get out of here before we're nothing but shape and color." Just before they make it through the door, they are transformed into nonfigurative shapes: Joy a yellow star-shaped polygon, Sadness a blue oval, and Bing Bong a curved pink triangle (fig. 8).



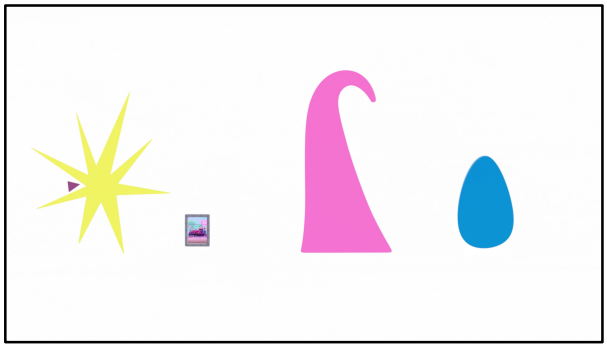


Fig. 7: The "two-dimensional" phase of Abstract Thought, and **Fig. 8:** The "nonfigurative" phase

The sequence is as playful and tongue-in-cheek as any of the film's other metaphoric vignettes ("Depth! I'm lacking *depth*!" Bing Bong shouts), but its meta-breakdown of the representational capacities of different animation styles reveals a sly self-awareness to Pixar's strategy for representing cognition. Though deconstructed, nonfigurative representations of interior processes are certainly *possible*, the chaos of the sequence suggests that Pixar's visual storytellers perceive a tense relationship between narrative and abstraction—Sadness explains, significantly, that if they stray too far from their original forms, they will be "stuck [as nonfigurative shapes] forever."

If *Inside Out* formulates abstraction (both visual and cognitive) as a source of corporeal and narrative disintegration, its compartmentalization safeguards the film against the most dangerous possibilities of the medium. The monochromatic industrial facade of the Abstract Thought building distinguishes it sharply from the rainbow-colored world around it. Throughout Riley's mind, even the most overtly mechanistic images are softened by smooth curves and friendly faces, but Abstract Thought is all business; the squat structure sports exposed pipes, thick metal doors, and a sign reading "DANGER: KEEP OUT." The film's dysphemistic imagery and efforts to literally "wall in" a less concrete visual language illustrates how it is possible for a medium defined in part by an irreverent "destabilization of received knowledge" to relinquish that capacity in the name of structuring and simplification.[30] After briefly considering the alternative, *Inside Out*'s return to categories is quick and wholehearted.

*

Thus far I've argued that *Inside Out* is defined by a dualistic narrative and visual strategy predicated on a spatial separation between cognitive and bodily experiences. It formalizes the interactions between these two through visual metaphors of mechanization, aligning the film with "interest motivator" theories of affect which assert the primacy of cognition over physical processes. The film's metaphorizing and category-making visual mode illustrates its use of animation for organization and structuring, a preference that reflects its industrial production process and the strong link between vision and cognition that undergirds categorical affect systems. Though there are clear shortcomings to both categorical theories and a rule-bound approach to animation, the film's meta-analysis of its own use of the medium demonstrates that its visual strategy is a deliberate act of formal circumscription in the name of narrative and theoretical coherence.

[30] Wells, *AA*, 17.

Until this point, then, the film has basically been an enterprise in demonstrating the *benefits* of categories, through its charming and intuitive acts of metaphorization, its "spectacle of organization," and its brief comparisons to more fluid representational paradigms. But the film also anticipates the *shortcomings* of its categorical approach; for one thing, a number of crucial elements of the film are literally rough around the edges. When Joy appears for the first time, the "screen" of Riley's vision is blurred and hairlike at the edges, and every Emotion has fuzzy, cotton-ball-like skin. The fuzzy, unclear boundaries of *Inside Out*'s Emotions, on the one hand a formally innovative strategy for demonstrating their immaterial "cognitiveness," also provide a convenient correlative to Gregg and Seigworth's observation that contemporary theories of emotion tend to formulate bodies as "defined not by an outer skin-envelope or other surface boundary but by their potential to reciprocate or co-participate in the passages of affect."[31] This isn't to say that the film is at all invested in the loose Deleuzian principles that motivate lenient definitions of embodiment, but the Emotions' hazy "skin" at least *acknowledges* (in formal terms) the significance of the "thresholds and tensions, blends and blurs" that complicate neatly constructed categories (fig. 9).[32]

More significantly, though, the film's narrative anticipates and accounts for the flaws of categorization writ-large by visualizing a crisis in Riley's family life as a disruption to the structural motifs at the foundation of its visual language. After an early montage of Riley's childhood, the film settles into the frame story: her family's move to San Francisco. A characteristically efficient piece of screenwriting, the montage serves the dual function of demonstrating how the Emotions' "control panel" works and showing the viewer a handful of important memories that Riley is leaving behind: her childhood home, her friends, her hockey

[31] Gregg and Seigworth, "An Inventory of Shimmers," 2.

[32] Ibid., 4.

team. Joy hints at possible dysfunction during her voiceover at the beginning of the film, while describing the roles of each of the Emotions. Fear is "really good at keeping Riley safe," Disgust's job is to "keep Riley from being poisoned," and Anger "cares very deeply about things being fair"—but Joy glosses euphemistically over her inability to find a place for Sadness: "I've checked," she says. "There's no place for her to go. So, she's good. We're good. It's all great."

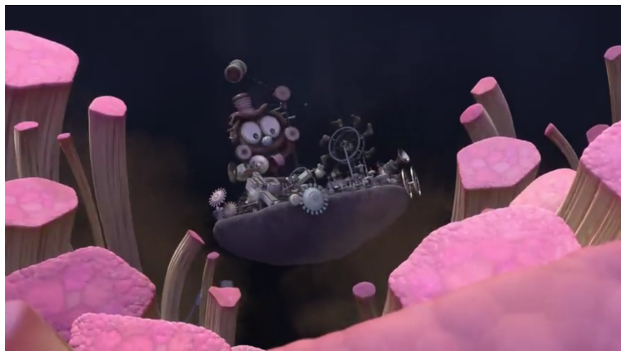



Fig. 9: Anger's hazy skin, and **Fig. 10:** Goofball Island collapses into the "memory dump"

Riley's arrival in San Francisco provides the first challenges to the Emotions' task of keeping Joy at the forefront of her conscious experience: her house is old and dilapidated, her parents are stressed, the pizza is made with broccoli, and she has trouble fitting in at school. Inside Riley's head, the Emotions struggle to come up with coping strategies like starting up an ersatz hockey game with a broom, imagining the possible arrangement of her new bedroom, and "replaying" happy memories from Riley's childhood in Minnesota. But all of these efforts fail: Riley's father gets a phone call, interrupting the hockey game; the movers get lost, postponing the furniture's arrival; and finally, the happy memories are interrupted by Sadness, who finds herself inexplicably compelled to touch the memory orb as it floats in the mind's "projector," changing its color-coding from gold to blue.

This strange impulse to transform happy memories into sad ones is what sets the film's Inside narrative in motion. After Sadness re-colors a "core memory," Joy tries to prevent the orb from being sucked into the pneumatic machine that will catalog it as a part of Riley's

personality; in the ensuing struggle, both Joy and Sadness are pulled out of Headquarters and deposited in the far-off archives of memory. Seeing Headquarters in the distance, Joy and Sadness quickly realize that if they don't make it back in time, Riley will be incapable of feeling happiness at all.

Riley's attempts to process the stresses of her new life without a full set of emotions quickly takes its toll on the Inside world. When her father, seeing that she is discouraged and unhappy, attempts to cheer her up by pretending to be a monkey (an important childhood memory), Anger, Fear and Disgust are unable to elicit the proper reaction from the control panel. Through the window, they watch as the gears and machines on "Goofball Island" stop working; the factory grows dim and static, then collapses into the canyon below (fig. 10). One by one, the other factories—Hockey Island, Friendship Island, Family Island—stop functioning and fall into the abyss. Frustrated and depressed, Riley decides to run away.

If the film metaphorizes the benefits of a categorical approach to affect using motifs of architecture and structuration, its images of demolition brought on by overwhelming Outside circumstances underscore the danger of assuming that such a system is airtight and comprehensive. In his "Argument for Basic Emotions," Ekman meticulously lays out nine biological prerequisites for what he sees as the most fundamental emotional categories, including "distinctive universal signals," "comprehensible expressions in other animals," and "universal antecedent events."[33] Ekman's empirical impulse, apparent in his emphasis on "distinct" and "universal" phenomena, shares a certain taxonomic rigidity with *Inside Out*'s categorical structure at the beginning of the film, a system in which everything—excluding Sadness—fits right into its proper place. And though Ekman acknowledges the existence of "other affective

[33] Paul Ekman, "An Argument for Basic Emotions," in *Cognition and Emotion* 6.3 (1992), 169-200.

phenomena" (i.e., those that do not fulfill his nine biological prerequisites), he states that "it should be clear by now that I do not allow for 'non-basic' emotions."[34]

Though *Inside Out* basically holds to Ekman's guiding principles, it challenges the rigidity of his empirical approach. At the start of the film, Riley's "basic emotions" consist of Joy, Anger, Fear, and Disgust—if each Emotion is defined in terms of its function, Sadness is decidedly *not* a part of the mind's fine-tuned cognitive system. But what Joy attempts to cast as a minor flaw in the film's categorical system (at one point she attempts to fix it by literally circumscribing Sadness in a chalk circle while the other emotions do their jobs) is revealed to be an enormous and destructive foundational instability. And just as animation helps the film organize abstract concepts into intuitive and comprehensible structures of categories and visual metaphors, in the second half its capacity for destabilization helps to problematize this approach.

As they try and fail to use the mind's crumbling structures to get back to Headquarters, then, Joy and Sadness are themselves subjected to the shortcomings of the film's imperfect rules—and to the fluidity of the medium as a whole. For if animation is, as Wells argues, "fundamentally [...] responsive to, and expressive of, change," it is perhaps as well equipped to represent the fluctuations of a visual strategy as it is to construct one in the first place.[35]

Inside Out's sequences of diegetic collapse—and the Emotions' attempts to process them—are part of a long history of metacinematic tensions between character and world in animated films. In films like Dave Fleischer's *Bimbo's Initiation* (1931) and Chuck Jones' *Duck Amuck* (1953), the anything-goes fluidity of the animated diegesis threatens the stability of characters' understanding of the world. In Fleischer's surreal and Kafkaesque film, Betty Boop's canine friend Bimbo finds himself trapped in the labyrinthine headquarters of a secret society;

[34] Ibid., 195.

[35] Wells, *AA*, 17.

trapdoors open up in solid stone floors and shadowy figures pass through walls as Bimbo simultaneously tries to comprehend and escape from his frightful surroundings (fig. 11). In Jones' film, Daffy Duck gets into an argument with an antagonistic animator, who repeatedly changes the visual parameters of the film—the background, the color scheme, even Daffy's body—without warning (fig. 12).

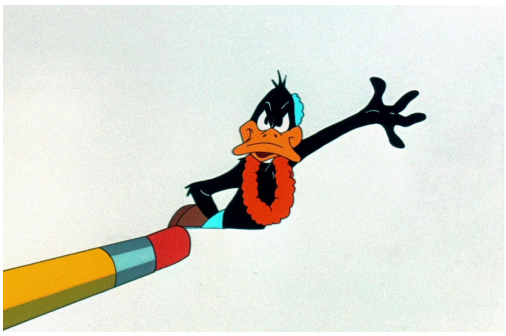



Fig. 11: Fleischer's *Bimbo's Initiation*, and **Fig. 12:** Jones' *Duck Amuck*

In both of these films, the inherent instability of animation's plasmatic world plays out at the expense of the characters who inhabit it. As Ursula Heise writes, these sorts of structural changes at the hands of unknown forces "insinuate that agency and subjecthood might be questions of perspective rather than essence."[36] And while *Inside Out*'s sequences of categorical collapse don't go so far as to question the basic subjectivity of Joy and Sadness, they certainly offer a corrective to the "interest motivator" theory predicated on the Emotions' autonomous control over Riley's body. In this sense, the film simultaneously illustrates the flaws of a taxonomizing, cognitivist system to both the characters and the viewer.

Ultimately, the plot's resolution—and the successful reconstruction of Riley's mind—relies on a newfound malleability to the film's structuring principles. After Joy "rewinds" a happy memory and discovers that a moment of comfort in Riley's childhood (being tossed in the air by her parents and her hockey team) was actually precipitated by an outward display of

[36] Ursula Heise, "Plasmatic Nature: Environmentalism and Animated Film," in *Public Culture* 26.2 (Spring 2014), 314.

discouragement (defeat in an important game), she has a realization: "Mom and Dad came to help because of Sadness." She devises a strategy to get back to headquarters,[37] then allows Sadness to operate the control panel for the first time. To get Riley to return home, Sadness turns a handful of "core memories" from gold to blue, prompting Riley to turn back and seek the comfort of her family. After a cathartic reconciliation with her parents, a multicolored memory orb rolls out from behind Riley's "screen"—half blue, half gold. The film wraps up quickly after this scene, with a montage depicting her new, better-adjusted life. A mind worker installs a new, updated control panel with more buttons, a new set of personality islands fills the horizon, and the "core memory" panel in the center of the room is filled with multicolored orbs: red and gold, purple and green, blue and red.

By incorporating the problems with its visual strategy into a new and improved set of visual "rules," *Inside Out* demonstrates the utility of a malleable commitment to not-quite-perfect body of theory. By acknowledging of the validity (and the insistence) of experiences that push back against the neat demarcations of its color-coded visual shorthand, the film engages with a broader question of the utility of the utility of theoretical "structures" in the first place. In this sense, the significance of the blue-gold orb is not so much that colors can blend as that *systems can bend* to incorporate experiences or concepts that exceed their purview.

This emphasis on the flexibility of its visual strategy illustrates *Inside Out*'s resonance with Eve Sedgwick and Adam Frank's principle of "attenuated adherence" to imperfect theory. In their landmark essay "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins," Sedgwick and Frank argue that while anyone with even an introductory knowledge of theory might "make mincemeat" of Tomkins' categorical affect theory (which bears a number of similarities to

[37] She builds a tower out of "Imaginary Boyfriends" churned out by one of the few functioning factories remaining in Riley's head.

Ekman's),[38] his peculiar writing style nevertheless prompts a crucial investigation of certain reflexive critical suspicions.[39]

Though Tomkins' assertion of nine irreducible, biological categories of feeling inevitably sets off critical alarm bells with its implicit adherence to the universalizing, "conversation-stopping word *innate*," Sedgwick and Frank argue that this adherence "proves a spectacularly attenuable one."[40] Foregrounding Tomkins' method and motivations rather than the end result of his theory, they admit that "at some level we have not demanded even of ourselves [...] whether we believe this [categorical] hypothesis to be true."[41] In this way, Sedgwick and Frank exemplify Gregg and Seigworth's assertion that much of affect theory is about "the stretching of *process underway*, not position taken."[42]

Like Sedgwick and Frank's argument for reading Silvan Tomkins, *Inside Out* is an argument for a critical imagination beyond the parameters of theory rather than a suspicious fixation with its blurry borders. Critiquing the strange theoretical dualism that they argue emerges from a reflexive suspicion of knowledge systems with "finitely many (n>2) values," Sedgwick and Frank use the analogy of "a scanner or copier that can reproduce any work of art in 256,000 shades of gray. However infinitesimally subtle its discriminations may be, there are crucial knowledges it simply cannot transmit unless it is equipped to deal with the coarsely

---

[38] See Paul Ekman, "Paul Ekman on Silvan Tomkins and Facial Expression." *The Tomkins Institute*. http://www.tomkins.org/what-tomkins-said/what-others-said-about-tomkins/paul-ekman-on-silvan-tomkins-and-facial-expression.

[39] Eve Sedgwick and Adam Frank, "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold," in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 95.

[40] Ibid., 108.

[41] Ibid., 117.

[42] Gregg and Seigworth, "An Inventory of Shimmers," 11. My italics.

reductive possibility that red is different from yellow is different again from blue."[43] *Inside Out*'s transition from color-coding to color-blending is just one example of the advantages of working within an imperfect but fundamentally malleable system, a gesture toward the possibility of future adjustments. In this way, the film subtly asserts its categorical visual strategy as a provisional, rather than rigid, representational apparatus.

Inside Out exemplifies the cinema of "spectacular attenuation." While its dualistic narrative structure and categorical visual language may point toward a problematic cognitivist understanding of affect, the film nevertheless uses the structuring and *de*structuring capacities of animation to explore the strengths and weaknesses of the "interest motivator" theory of body-mind relations that undergirds its narrative and visual logics. By diegetically integrating its own conceptual shortcomings, *Inside Out* engages with and accounts for the challenges posed by experiences that transgress color-coded boundaries, exemplifying the benefits of "attenuated adherence" to flawed but well-intentioned bodies of scholarship—an attenuation made possible by the unique adaptive capacities of animation.

*

Still, the film's acknowledgement of the general category of "theoretical shortcomings" hardly constitutes a detailed engagement with its conceptual flaws. While *Inside Out* effectively illustrates the resonances between affect's and animation's affinities for shifting strategies and flexible frameworks—and provides a basis for a quasi-categorical perspective I will occasionally lean on in my next two chapters—it also presents a handful of what Sedgwick and Frank (perhaps somewhat generously) term "sites of productive opacity."[44] That is, it raises and does

[43] Sedgwick and Frank, "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold," 114.

[44] Ibid., 106-7.

not answer a number of questions that I will take up in my examinations of Charlie Kaufman and Duke Johnson's *Anomalisa* and Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away*.

For one thing, the film's entirely audiovisual approach—which implicitly affirms that the only experiences relevant to cognitive judgment are those that can be projected onto a screen—essentially neglects the body as a site of affective phenomena. I have argued that *Inside Out* codifies this cognitivist paradigm through its links between vision and thought as well as the spatial separation implied by its back-and-forth story structure; but the film's images of verticality also illustrate its apprehensive view of the space below the head. The canyon beneath Headquarters and the personality islands is not a path to the body but rather an abyss, oblivion. Like the chaos of the Abstract Thought sequence, the film demarcates the space below the head as an area of physical and narrative danger: "If we fall," Sadness says, "we'll be forgotten forever." The dread surrounding the "memory dump" reflects what Gregg and Seigworth identify as a feeling of "methodological and conceptual free fall" in affect theories that stray too far from comfortable categories, "letting themselves get lost in an overabundance of swarming, sliding differences."[45] These conveniently overlapping notions of "falling" reflect the importance of the motif of verticality in theorizing cognition in relation to the body: Massumi formulates affect as "function-meaning interloops that travel vertical path between head and heart,"[46] while Bakhtin imagines a series of "strata," between the material world of the body and the isolation of the individual mind.[47] But whereas body-centric theories like Massumi's and Bakhtin's thrive in the loose alinguistic (or prelinguistic) mode that accompanies a move away from the head, *Inside*

[45] Gregg and Seigworth, "An Inventory of Shimmers," 4.

[46] Massumi, *PV*, 25.

[47] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1968), 21. Hereafter designated *RW*.

Out conceives it as a threat to narrative stability, a place where one "falls" and never comes back.

In the second half of my thesis, I'll be diving deliberately into these spaces, examining first how animation is equipped to elide the representational gaps between sensation and cognition, between affect and emotion, between subject and world. *Anomalisa* demonstrates both animation's capacity and the theoretical imperative to incorporate sensory experiences into the affective "circuit," underscoring the importance of co-constitutive physiological and psychological processes in generating positive affect through the example of a protagonist who gets the balance horribly wrong.

Inside Out's second major "opacity" is its ambiguous sense of the Emotions' agency. Though they "drive" Riley's body by manipulating her cognitive control panel, the status of their *autonomy* is ultimately unclear. Sadness, for example, is unable explain what motivates her to touch the memory orb as it floats in the projector at the beginning of the film. In my chapter on *Spirited Away*, I explore how received value systems codify the aesthetic judgments that inflect affective responses, arguing that theoretical priorities based on the exclusion of "disattendable" forms are themselves sources of negative affect.

*

All in the Head:
Anomalisa's Affective Anaesthesia

In one of the comedic set-pieces of Charlie Kaufman and Spike Jonze's *Being John Malkovich* (1999), the film's protagonist (Craig Schwartz, an out-of-work puppeteer forced to busk on the streets of New York) performs a sexually suggestive puppet show based on the romance of Abelard and Heloise. Atop a soundtrack of tinny opera music played on a nearby boombox, the pre-recorded voices of Schwartz and his girlfriend, voice-acting the separated French lovers, confess the depths of their sexual desire: "Sometimes," Heloise says, "my thoughts are betrayed by the movement of my body." Abelard responds: "I took my fill of my wretched pleasures in you, and this was the sum total of my love." The puppets begin to gyrate, pressing their bodies against pieces of furniture (fig. 1). Unbeknownst to Schwartz, a five-year-old girl has stopped to watch, drawn in by the novelty of the puppet show. When the girl's father notices what she's looking at, he punches Schwartz in the face.

Later in the film, Schwartz will discover a mysterious portal that leads to the inside of John Malkovich's head, granting him control over the actor's body. Using his newfound powers, Schwartz vicariously lives out his professional ambitions and sexual fantasies through his charming and charismatic persona, making Malkovich a world-famous puppeteer. *Being John Malkovich*'s fascination with the head—particularly its ability to control the physical circumstances of the body—is a recurring theme in Kaufman's scripts. In the Michel Gondry-directed film *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004), a man attempts to process a painful breakup by paying a team of neuroscientists to remove his memories of the relationship, only to change his mind as the memory machine forces him to rapidly relive his experiences. In Kaufman's directorial debut *Synecdoche, New York* (2008), a death-obsessed playwright

attempts to forestall the decay of his body by creating a one-to-one scale replica of his life. In each of these films, the mind becomes a kind of *mise en abyme*, an apparently endless labyrinth where characters seek refuge from the difficult realities of the world around them.

Fig. 1: Abelard and Heloise's sexual frustration in *Being John Malkovich*.

Kaufman's second directorial effort, 2015's *Anomalisa*, marks a departure from his string of films about characters lost in byzantine mazes of self-analysis. A stop-motion animated film about a depressed customer service expert who suffers from the delusion that everyone in the world looks and sounds identical, *Anomalisa* takes a new approach to the motif of "being stuck in one's head." Rather than conceiving of the mind as a spatially distinct location in the manner of *Being John Malkovich* or *Eternal Sunshine*—or indeed of *Inside Out*—*Anomalisa* visualizes Michael Stone's solipsism by blurring the boundary between his subjective perceptions and the film's objective depictions of the world.

If *Inside Out* gestures toward the importance of embodied experience by depicting the structural shortcomings of its cognitivist guiding principles, it does little to illustrate how physiological processes fit into the mind-body circuit that generates (and constitutes) affect. As media-theorist-turned-affect-theorist Richard Grusin sees it, we ought to think of the "mediation" of the senses "as the process, action, or event that generates or provides the conditions for the emergence of subjects and objects, for the individuation of entities within the

world."[1] By this paradigm, Pixar's clean division between Inside and Out could not even exist without the physiological processes that "individuate" subjects.

Grusin's approach to affect, a smart twenty-first century revision of his thesis that mediation constitutes, rather than hinders, our interactions with the world, reflects his awareness of recent critical focus on the oftentimes porous boundaries of subjecthood.[2] As Heather Houser writes, "humans and the more-than-human world do not only interact but, more importantly, are co-constitutive."[3] Houser's formulation is in the context of her argument about the shared consequences of human and environmental "illnesses," but it neatly illustrates *Anomalisa*'s perspectivally ambiguous strategy for critiquing its protagonist's solipsistic worldview. Stuck in his head, Michael Stone's life is "anaesthetic," cut off from his corporeal senses—leaving his overworked mind to fill in the gaps.

Through its cinematographic tricks as well as its visual and narrative motifs of emptiness, *Anomalisa* devises a mise en scène that is at once *depictive* (as an objective photographic representation) and *constitutive* (as a subjective perception) of Michael's isolation. In this way, the film's use of stop-motion puppetry to objectify and dehumanize its characters simultaneously emphasizes and exacerbates Michael's isolation, illustrating the consequences of an imbalance between body and mind.

The first of the film's cinematographic "slippages" occurs in its opening images. Fading in from a black frame, an airplane emerges from a bank of clouds in an extreme-long shot,

---

[1] Richard Grusin, "Radical Mediation," in *Critical Inquiry* 42.1 (Autumn 2015), 129.

[2] See Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998).

[3] Houser, *Ecosickness*, 3.

against the sound of several intermingling conversations.[4] This is traditionally designated an establishing shot—a far-off, third-person-perspective image that either zooms or cuts to a closer shot in which characters can be introduced. By this paradigm, we would expect the film to flow inward, perhaps cutting to a shot of the protagonist looking contemplatively through his window, or flipping through an in-flight magazine.

Fig. 2: *Anomalisa*'s perspectivally ambiguous opening shot.

But having established the expectation that the first scene of the film will be set aboard the onscreen plane, *Anomalisa* quickly turns counterclassical, reversing the traditional flow of continuity editing by zooming *out*. Among the mingling offscreen voices, someone says "Hey, ma, look, an airplane." While the line seems at first like an innocuous, childlike observation, it immediately begs an important question: *Where are the voices coming from, if not from aboard the plane?* The film provides an answer as the shot zooms further out. A frame appears at the edges of the screen, and it gradually becomes clear that the opening image was in fact the view from the window of *another* plane (fig. 2). Finally, the film pulls back to a medium shot of Michael looking through his window, revealing that the opening shot had been from his point of view—not an objective, third-person establishing shot, but a first-person perspectival shot.

[4] The voices sound eerily similar—because all of them belong to Tom Noonan.

The most salient feature of this opening is probably the "gotcha" effect of subverting traditional storytelling grammar. There are a number of such moments in the film, in which the camera performs an "impossible" move that disrupts the illusion of cinematographic realism; in a dream sequence later in the film, for example, Michael looks at a doorway in a first-person perspectival shot. After a beat, he emerges through the same door, heading straight toward the camera. These destabilizing moments rely on and disrupt stop-motion animation's illusion of "reality," foregrounding the way that the objects in the frame are simultaneously "real" (i.e., photographed with a camera) and artificial (i.e., all of it is constructed by the filmmakers).

Shots like *Anomalisa*'s opening elide the gap between objective third-person and subjective first-person perspectives,[5] suggesting from the get-go that the film will occupy some coextensive space between the two—and illustrating animation's unique capacity to do so. For if *Inside Out* literalized Paul Wells' thesis about "oscillation" between interior and exterior states, *Anomalisa* offers a more nuanced view of the interactions between them, evoking Sianne Ngai's emphasis on the "affective indeterminacy" of a similarly ambiguous shot in Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity*.[6] She argues that such slippages between first- and third-person perspectives complicate the distinction "between subjective and objective reality."[7]

Expanding on the perspectival ambiguity of Wilder's cinematography, Ngai identifies in Herman Melville's *The Confidence Man* a similarly slippery and unsatisfying "textual feeling" that pervades the novel without residing completely in any of its characters. Setting out to explore the aesthetic characteristics of critically neglected negative emotions (a category she

[5] I'll acknowledge that there isn't necessarily a one-to-one correspondence between these categories; cinema has always been able to tell stories from a character's *point* of view without being constrained to their literal *field* of view.

[6] Ngai, *UF*, 14.

[7] Ibid., 20.

terms "ugly feelings" because of these emotions' "non-productive" position in traditional aesthetic systems), Ngai digs into the long-standing ambiguity surrounding the precise "location" of literary tone.[8] Arguing that "tone" defies concrete situation in either the text or the reader, she draws parallels to scholars' use of *affect* to sort out similar difficulties in "distinguishing first-person from third-person feeling, and, by extension, feeling that is contained by an identity from feeling that is not.[9] Slipping without warning between Michael's point of view and a broader narratorial perspective, *Anomalisa*'s cinematography presents similar difficulties in sorting out what elements of the frame are and are not "contained by an identity."

If the film's slippery visual strategy is similar to the "textual feeling" of Melville's novel, so too are the "nonfeltness" and "illegibility" of its own tone. Foregrounding what she sees as a sort of affective evacuation in the novel's characters, Ngai argues that "the world of [*The Confidence Man*'s] story *runs on a feeling that no one actually feels*."[10] In both its visual style and the interactions between its characters, *Anomalisa* depicts a similar series of literal and metaphorical emptinesses. When Michael gets a cab to his hotel in Cincinnati (he has flown to Ohio to give a speech at a customer service convention), the film includes his entire conversation with the driver. In an exchange full of semi-interruptions and uncomfortable silences, they talk about Michael's accent, the zoo,[11] and Cincinnati chili—and just as in real life, a few minutes of insubstantial small talk telescopes to feel like hours.

---

[8] The exact ambiguity arising from the fact that tone "is reducible neither to the emotional response a text solicits from its reader nor to the representations of feelings within the world of its story" (Ngai 41).

[9] Ibid., 27.

[10] Ibid., 69. Italics Ngai's.

[11] A running joke in the film is that the zoo advertises itself as "zoo-sized," a tautology that is itself an example of *Anomalisa*'s narrative mode of "spreading thin."

The film is full of moments like these, in which a bare minimum of substance is expanded to fill as much space and time as possible. When Michael orders room service at his hotel, the desk attendant on the phone repeats his order with an absurd degree of detail: Michael's succinct "I'll have the bibb salad and the salmon" becomes "a bibb lettuce, Gorgonzola, prosciutto, and walnut salad [...] with honey raspberry vinaigrette dressing [...] and the wild-caught Copper River Alaska salmon amandine [...] with baby asparagus [...] and the black truffle broth."[12] The dilation of Michael's order takes on a sense of urgency as Michael repeatedly attempts to break off the conversation; Michael's slight agitation, despite (or perhaps because of) the conversation's inconsequential subject matter, hints at the affective consequences of his inability to connect with the people around him. His insubstantial world leaves him emotionally unfulfilled.

This motif of expanding emptiness permeates the film's visual style—particularly its set design, the background against which Michael's emotional crisis plays out. The film is dominated by shades of gold and beige, which initially convey a sense of warmth but are quickly linked to the drab interior of Michael's hotel. Here the modulation of the film's environment, certainly possible in a live action film, is amplified by the complete diegetic control afforded by animation. Everything in the film—down to the buttons on Michael's shirt and the scroll wheel of his circa-2003 iPod—is constructed to convey an ordinariness that takes on an oppressive dimension in the peculiar diegetic space that both represents and interacts with Michael's mind.

And just as *Anomalisa*'s cinematography both mimics and contributes to Michael's subjective experience, the hotel's shallow, surface-level warmth is both a representation of Michael's interior state and a catalyst for further frustration. The contrast between the

[12] The ellipses here are places where Michael attempts, without success, to end the conversation by confirming that the bellhop does, in fact, have the order correct.

obsequious service of the hotel employees and the the depressingly tautological conversation Michael has with his wife ("So, um…what else? I mean, how's your room?" "It's, you know, it's a room") prompts him to try and reconnect with an old girlfriend he remembered on the plane (a woman named Bella), but the rendezvous at the hotel bar quickly falls apart when it becomes clear that she still hasn't recovered from their breakup.

Prompted to explain his erratic behavior (both past and present), Michael confesses that he thinks he "might have psychological problems," indicating at least an oblique understanding that the identical faces of every other character in the film may be an illusion. He asks Bella repeatedly if she "changed" toward the end of their relationship, growing agitated and repeating himself when she doesn't understand the question: "Like, did I change you? Did you change? Did anything change? Did a change *occur*?" When Bella rejects an invitation to his room and leaves the bar, Michael yells after her that he was "just trying to understand"—though, in the absence of a direct object, what exactly he wants to grasp remains conspicuously unspecified.

Michael's frustrated aporia (he doesn't even know what he wants to know) highlights the elusiveness of both his own subjective emotions and the film's affective orientation. And just as *Anomalisa* makes frequent use of the paradoxical motif of "expansive emptiness," Ngai later describes affect as a similarly self-contradictory "*fugitive presence* attached to or hovering in the vicinity of words," a feeling that both is and isn't "there."[13] Michael's inability to process or interpret the "fugitive presence" of his own emotional itself becomes a source of frustration, evoking a dilemma that Wendy Anne Lee identifies in another of Melville's works: "Insensibility, or the Bartleby problem, [...] reaches back to the difficulty in Western philosophy of conceptualizing the relay between interior and exterior, feeling and action, in and across

[13] Ngai, *UF*, 46. My italics.

bodies."[14] She argues that Melville's inscrutable scrivener presents an interpretive crisis that challenges the necessity of "motion" implicit in the concept of "*e*motion," writing that "the subject who has never *moved* initiates a desperate search for signs of interior motion [...] bound, of course, to fail."[15] The frustrating lack of substance in Michael's perception of the hotel and the people around him forces him to grapple with another kind of insensibility, one arising not from the absence of affective "motion" but from a sheer lack of physical qualification.

In the same manner as the hotel's oppressive beigeness, this crisis of insensibility is both reflected and exacerbated by the film's use of stop-motion to dehumanize and de-individuate its characters. As the ominous choir of Noonan-voiced plane passengers portended during the film's opening sequence, the film's central narrative conceit—that Michael perceives everyone else in the world as the same person—takes on a blandly nightmarish cast as the film progresses. Like the unnerving yet captivating Abelard and Heloise sequence in *Being John Malkovich*, Kaufman and Johnson's use of stop-motion puppetry holds up the verisimilitude and artificiality of its images simultaneously, diving directly into the "uncanny valley" that has long hindered animators' attempts to create "realistic" characters. "Not-quite-there" representations can disrupt viewers' immersion in a film's narrative—see Robert Zemeckis' *Polar Express* (2004), whose thoroughly mixed critical reception ranged from at worst "a failed and lifeless experiment"[16] to at best "a little creepy."[17]

---

[14] Wendy Anne Lee, "The Scandal of Insensibility; or, The Bartleby Problem." In *PMLA* 130.5 (October 2015), 1406.

[15] Ibid., 1410. My italics.

[16] Peter Travers. "The Polar Express." *Rolling Stone*. November 18, 2004. http://www.rollingstone.com/movies/reviews/the-polar-express-20041118.

[17] Roger Ebert. "The Polar Express." *Roger Ebert*. November 9, 2004. http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/the-polar-express-2004.

Still, for some filmmakers the uncanny valley is an asset. In master Czech animator Jan Švankmajer's *Food* (1992), for example, human actors are occasionally replaced with photorealistic clay models, which stretch unnaturally to accommodate the enormous bites they take while eating. Eventually, the clay models' chests open up, revealing an intricate system of gears and pulleys. The unnerving effect of Švankmajer's film relies on stop-motion's ability to simultaneously objectify and mechanize its subjects, endowing insentient objects with a conspicuous yet eerily circumscribed "animus." Ngai calls this paradoxical quality "animatedness," arguing that it "not only returns us to the connection between the emotive and the mechanistic but also commingles antithetical notions of physical agency."[18] By enunciating the artificial process of its own creation, then, stop-motion foregrounds the objecthood of its subjects, continually emphasizing the fact that what Disney called animation's "illusion of life" is just what the name implies—illusory.[19]

Anomalisa takes stop-motion's capacity for both verisimilitude and objectification to extremes rarely seen in the medium. In an interview just after the film's release, Kaufman acknowledges the peculiar distancing effect of *Anomalisa*'s commitment to detail: "you're interested because you know that there were decisions made every time he moves [...] you get fascinated with the choices made, and the craftsmanship that goes into it."[20] The film is full of hugely ambitious efforts that are disguised by their sheer mundaneness: Michael's tiny, functioning belt buckle; diffused, on-set background lighting; anatomically accurate footsteps;

---

[18] Ngai, *UF*, 100.

[19] See Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston, *The Illusion of Life: Disney Animation* (New York: Abbeville, 1981).

[20] Charlie Kaufman and Tim Gray. "'Anomalisa': The Big Challenges of Re-Creating Life on a Small Scale." *Variety*. December 30, 2015. https://variety.com/2015/artisans/news/anomalisa-small-scale-challenges-1201664471.

the use of hundreds of 3D-printed faceplates for every imaginable facial expression and phoneme. "If this were a live-action movie," Kaufman says, "we could have shot it in a week. As opposed to two years."[21]

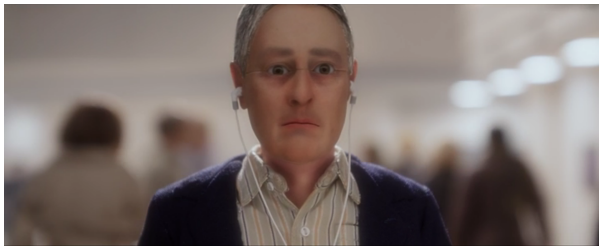



Fig. 3: Michael's "Fregoli delusion," and **Fig. 4:** His cinematographic isolation.

So *Anomalisa* undoubtedly tries very hard to look and act like a live-action film. But in addition to its few moments of destabilizing or impossible cinematography, the film also disrupts these efforts by preserving the horizontal "face lines" that are ordinarily rubbed out of stop-motion films in postproduction (figs. 2-4).[22] Likewise, Kaufman and Johnson opted not to normalize the colors of characters' faceplates,[23] retaining slight variations between individual facial expressions. So while the film may rank among the most lifelike puppet shows ever created, it nevertheless insistently reminds the viewer of its puppets' lifelessness. Like *Anomalisa*'s cinematographic slips between first- and third-person perspectives, the dehumanization that accompanies the film's enunciation of its own production process exists in a coextensive diegesis that is only ambiguously committed to narratorial objectivity.

This ambiguity takes on enormous significance in the context of Michael's "delusion" that every single character—excluding, briefly, one other person—is *literally* the same person. Perhaps the most literal interpretation of this conceit is that Michael is experiencing a "Fregoli

[21] Ibid.

[22] Stop-motion almost always relies on a process called "replacement animation," which uses prefabricated face models like the ones mentioned above.

[23] Another consequence of using a 3D printer that is usually an easy postproduction fix.

delusion," a psychological condition whose sufferers believe that different people are in fact the same person in disguise. Delusion or solipsistic metaphor, the homogeneity of the film's non-Michael characters emphasizes their artificiality and further complicates the question of whether the diegesis is more faithful to Michael's subjective experience or to the world outside of his mind. In either case, the film visually separates Michael from the world around him in a number of ways; when he arrives at the airport, for example, the deep focus of a first-person perspectival shot reveals the identical faces of every other person at the terminal (fig. 3). But when the film cuts back to Michael's face, he is isolated by the shot's extremely shallow focus—all of the other characters are indistinct smudges in the background (fig. 4). Whatever world Michael lives in, he lives there alone.

*

Thus far I've argued that *Anomalisa* makes use of cinematographic trickery to slip between subjective and objective perspectives, demonstrating animation's capacity to reside in a co-constitutive space that muddies the distinction between the two. Michael's illegible and unfulfilling affect relies on this blurring effect, in which his frustratingly bland surroundings simultaneously represent and contribute to his unhappiness. In this way, the film's use of stop-motion to foreground the artificiality of its characters—objectifying and homogenizing everyone Michael encounters—at once metaphorizes and exacerbates his isolation.

All of this basically characterizes the affective resting state of the first half of the film that, as in my chapter on *Inside Out*, will be scrambled by the introduction of a narrative complication. Like the protagonists of Kaufman's other films, Michael's unhappiness emerges from his solipsistic residence in his own head, here a motif that is not literalized as an object in the text—as in *Being John Malkovich*'s magic portal, *Adaptation*'s tortuously composed and

dizzyingly self-reflexive screenplay, or the enormous warehouse in *Synecdoche, New York* that contains a scale replica of Caden Cotard's entire life—but rather implied through the film's ambiguous diegetic commitments.

Michael's attempt to bring Bella to his hotel room signals a breaking point in the heady, cognitive slant that characterizes much of the film's first half. His clumsy grasp for physical satisfaction in the oppressively unsatisfying environment of the hotel illustrates the film's linkage of cognitive and bodily affective phenomena, even if Michael himself is not conscious of this connection. In the rest of this chapter, I'll show how Michael's persistent recourse to the body as a means of sating and expressing his "insensible" emotional state demonstrates the relay between corporeal and cognitive conceptions of affect, a subject that has been the focus of much recent scholarship on the tricky question of the relationship between sensing, thinking and feeling.


Fig. 5: Michael's unsatisfying shower, and **Fig. 6:** His faceplate "hallucination."

Michael's unsuccessful attempts to quell his emotional turmoil through sexual contact reflect an imbalance between the cerebral bent of the film's cinematography (which mimics his own inability to "understand" himself) and the insistent physical needs of his own body. Michael seems incapable of giving his body what it needs, and moments of comfort are frequently qualified and provisional. When he takes a shower after his failed rendezvous with Bella, the water temperature oscillates between freezing and scalding, and he shouts at no one in particular: "Fuck! You! Fuck you!" (fig. 5). Physical near-misses like this suggest a "numbing" effect that

accompanies the objectification and mechanization of the film's bodies through stop-motion, a reminder that each body is literally an insensate doll. Indeed, just before he meets Lisa for the first time, Michael has a "hallucination" in which he pulls off his faceplate after it begins to change against his will (fig. 6). Unsatisfied by his inability sort out his "insensible" depression, Michael's body begins to act up, seemingly of its own accord.

This literally deconstructive moment at once acknowledges the film's artificiality and illustrates the tension between Michael's body and his mind. With the introduction of Lisa, *Anomalisa*'s only other differentiated character (and its namesake), the film further asserts Michael's need for physical fulfillment, ratcheting up the narrative chaos when it is momentarily granted and subsequently denied. Michael and Lisa's short-lived affair foregrounds the urgency of sensory engagement described by Massumi and Buck-Morss as both a theoretical imperative and a necessity for subjective positive affect.

Just as *Anomalisa*'s cinematography evinces Ngai's point about perspectival slippages between "subjective and objective realities," her concept of affect as a "fugitive presence" neatly aligns with *Anomalisa*'s exploration of the link between the senses and emotional satisfaction. For one thing, the film's dubiously objective diegesis positions it well to link thematic questions of personal isolation and connection to a broader discourse on where "feelings" come from. Brian Massumi's digs into this question in the context of distinguishing between affect and emotion in *Parables for the Virtual*. Describing *emotion* as "a subjective content, the sociolinguistic fixing of the quality of an experience," Massumi aligns *affect* with the intentionally vague concept of "intensity," his word for the experiences of the "sensory surfaces" that make up the site of our interaction with the world outside our bodies.[24]

[24] Massumi, *PV*, 28, 14.

Presenting a study in which German TV viewers gave the perplexing response that the "saddest" of three short films was also the "pleasantest," Massumi divorces the "intensity" of the films (their effects on the eyes, ears, etc.) from their qualificative properties (a melting snowman evokes death, which is sad). He argues that "the level of intensity [...] is not semantically or semiotically ordered. It does not fix distinctions. Instead, it vaguely but insistently connects what is normally indexed as separate."[25] Affect's elusion of verbal apprehension is a kind of refrain throughout *Parables*, so much so that the "vagueness" Massumi describes in his description of intensity becomes an asset for his argument,[26] further proof of the need "to part company with the linguistic model" if we want to fully understand the body's importance in our lived experience.[27] "The skin," he writes, "is faster than the word."[28]

Trapped in his head, Michael experiences a tension between bodily and cognitive needs that mirrors Massumi's teasing out of the distinction between emotion and affect. For one thing, the fact that Michael's feelings so often escape him suggests that their origins may lie beyond the confines of language, literally "fugitive" in their constant evasion of his understanding. And Michael's inability to articulate just what he is "trying to understand" by inviting Bella to his room to "speak more privately" suggests two distinct ideas about the way to improve his condition: bodily, through physical (that is, sexual) contact; and cognitive, by verbally working out what's going on in his head. But just as the film's foothold-denying cinematography complicates the balance between subjective and objective realities, the expansive emptiness of

[25] Ibid., 24.

[26] Indeed, Massumi writes in the volume's introduction that "if at any point I thought of this [project] in terms of regaining a "concreteness" of experience, I was quickly disabused of the notion" (4).

[27] Ibid., 4.

[28] Ibid., 25.

Michael's emotional experience makes it difficult to map out the cognitive and corporeal origins of his feelings. Whatever the case may be, it seems clear that Michael has more than "psychological problems."

Though Massumi plays at scientism with his reference to the German emotion study, he is deliberately vague about the actual physiological mechanisms that turn affect into apprehensible "sociolinguistic fixings." By contrast, Susan Buck-Morss' re-articulation of the role of the senses in her 1992 essay "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics" helps to sort out the etiological ambiguity of Michael's "feelings"—a word that itself invites a great deal of debate.[29] Taking an etymologically scrupulous view of the word "aesthetics,"[30] Buck-Morss argues that "the original field of aesthetics is not art but reality—corporeal, material nature."[31] She writes that the "corporeal sensorium" is "'out front' of the mind, encountering the world prelinguistically."[32] In describing the senses with the spatial prepositional phrase "out front of" and the temporal prefix "pre-," Buck-Morss subtly (and pre-emptively) complicates Massumi's assertion that affect is "alinguistic" by offering a more concrete picture of the relationship between bodily and cognitive processes. Tracing lines that Massumi will follow three years later in "The Autonomy of Affect," Buck-Morss lays out a distinction between traditional theories of consciousness "which artificially isolat[e] human biology from its environment" and a more free-

[29] "*Feeling*," writes Rei Terada, "is a capacious term that connotes both [affect and emotion] I use it when it seems fruitful to emphasize the common ground of the physiological and the psychological." *Feeling in Theory*, 4.

[30] From "ancient Greek αἰσθητικός [aisthetikos], of or relating to sense perception" (*OED*).

[31] Susan Buck-Morss, "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered," in *October* 62 (Autumn 1992), 6.

[32] Ibid.

flowing body-world sensory system "decentered from the classical subject."[33] Crucially, she writes that "as the source of stimuli and the arena for motor response, the external world must be included to complete the sensory circuit."[34]

Buck-Morss' placement of aesthetics at the corporeal boundary of subjective experience (a place where first- and third-person "feelings" meet and blend) puts a more pragmatic slant on Massumi's "intensity" and resonates with the "blending" effect of *Anomalisa*'s corporeal and cinematographic paradoxes. Michael's frustration with the emptiness of his surroundings and the inscrutability of his own emotions also corresponds neatly with Ngai's formulation of "ugly feelings." Inherently "a-cathartic," "unproductive," and "slippery," Michael's emotional state consistently defies his apprehension—though it certainly fulfills Ngai's most important requirement: negativity.

With all of these voices in mind, Michael's emotional state is an ugly feeling of its own, an a-linguistic "anaesthesia" that preserves Buck-Morss' emphasis on the corporeal sensorium as a site that simultaneously defines and stretches the boundaries of subjective experience. Michael's anaesthesia corresponds closely to Ngai's description of *The Confidence Man*'s unnerving tone: "a feeling which is perceived rather than felt and whose very *nonfeltness* is perceived."[35] Michael's cognitive "feeling" arises from the awareness of a *lack* of feeling—a literal "senselessness" that results from a surfeit of cognition ("trying to understand") and a dearth of interaction with the world outside his mind. In *Anomalisa*'s perspectivally ambiguous diegetic world, there's little difference between Michael's solipsistic perceptions and the reality extrinsic to his head; the homogeneity of the characters that fill the world of the film *is* the world

[33] Ibid., 13.

[34] Ibid., 12.

[35] Ngai, *UF*, 76. My italics.

of "corporeal, material nature" that completes the "sensory circuit" in Buck-Morss' model of perception.[36] By this paradigm, Michael's "psychological problems," which cause everyone around him to look identical, might also be deemed *physical* problems—what's wrong with Michael's mind is also wrong with his body: his eyes and hears, his skin, his heart.

The film presents a potential cure for Michael's anaesthesia with the introduction of Lisa, an unassuming customer-service representative who comes to Cincinnati to hear Michael's speech—and the only other character in the film with a face and voice of her own. Michael freezes when he hears her in the hallway as he gets out of the shower, whispering "someone else" before throwing on his clothes and rushing out of his room to meet her; not long after this, he takes her to the hotel bar for drinks. Though there's little substance to their conversation ("Oh, I play the Jew's harp a little. [...] Anyway, I bought one of those, um, self-teaching… self-teaching? Is that right? Or is it self-learning?" "The Jew's harp is an underrated instrument." "I know!"), Michael is transfixed by the sight and sound of her, and quickly invites her to his room for a nightcap—his second attempt of the night. He obsesses over Lisa's particularities, especially the sound of her voice, which he says is "like magic." He asks her to sing, and she performs a few verses of Cyndi Lauper's "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun"; Michael is overwhelmed by her difference, and starts crying. Lisa, unaware of Michael's condition (and desperate for affection herself), perceives his fascination as a sign of genuine connection. They proceed to get undressed.

Michael's fascination with difference and physical peculiarities in his interactions with Lisa—in spite of the outright vapidity of their conversations—reflects a focus on surfaces and superficial details that exemplifies Buck-Morss' description of the senses as both physically and temporally "before" the mind. Though Michael and Lisa's long-term prospects are dubious at

[36] Buck-Morss, "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics," 6.

best, her physical differentiation at least fulfills the basic requirement of meaningful sensory interaction; with Lisa, Michael finally has an example of the positive corporeal *affect* that Massumi sees as the raw material for apprehensible *emotion*. The existence of the later requires the former to "travel the vertical path between head and heart."[37] Whereas *Inside Out* avoided the prelinguistic space of the body by visualizing it as an all-consuming fissure, *Anomalisa* uses animation's oscillatory mise en scène to transpose the cognitive consequences of Michael's defective mind-body circuit onto the world around him.

Though there's plenty to undercut the "connection" that serves as the basis for the sex scene that follows, its generous and straightforward cinematography underscores the film's emphasis on the body as a necessary component of fulfilling affective connection. Composed mainly of long, unbroken wide shots of Michael and Lisa, the scene again adopts a counterclassical grammar by including the little collisions, false-starts and awkwardnesses traditionally elided by cinematic representations of sex. Michael accidentally pulls Lisa's hair with his elbow; later, he hits his head on the bed's headboard; their dialogue is clumsy and stilted ("You're being quiet. Is it not good?" "No, it's fine. It's good. It's, um…just a little bit more gentle, maybe. At first, maybe.").

All the while, the film matter-of-factly depicts Michael and Lisa's unexceptional naked bodies (fig. 7). And where the decision to include every banal detail of a scene originally served to emphasize the lack of substance in Michael's interactions, here it gives the scene an aura of honesty; Lisa and Michael's lack of coordination reflects the urgency of their respective isolations—Lisa in her sheer ordinariness, and Michael in his solipsism. For both of characters, this connection is a necessary (if ersatz) reprieve. And, flimsily justified though their connection may be, it nevertheless provokes a real change in Michael's disposition. Whereas for the first

[37] Massumi, *PV*, 25.

half of the film, Michael is curt and rude to everyone he encounters, meeting Lisa prompts his first gestures of kindness and generosity. The positivity of their brief connection hinges on a celebration of difference; Michael is fascinated by everything that individuates Lisa, while she herself is enormously moved by the feeling that someone finally appreciates her for who she is.


Fig. 7: Michael and Lisa's sex scene **Fig. 8:** Michael's return to solipsism the following morning.

In a nightmare sequence directly following the sex scene, hordes of homogenous Noonan-voiced hotel employees urge Michael to leave Lisa: "Have it with anyone at all, anybody, just not Lisa. [...] We're all here for you. We're all *one* for you." He runs to his room to find Lisa, telling her that "Everyone is one person but you and me. You're the only other person in the world! [...] We need to stay together. Forever." When Lisa asks about his wife and son, he replies that "They don't exist. They're just *them*." The urgency of Michael's pleas suggests a deep connection between physical differentiation and meaningful emotional interaction, particularly his final collapsing of the distinction between not being *unique* and not *existing*. That he is only able to put his delusion into words ("You're the only other person in the world!") after a cathartic physical connection with another person substantiates Buck-Morss' and Massumi's models of the links between sensation, perception, affect and emotion—models which necessitate a corporeal a "starting point" for experiences that attain linguistic significance in the mind's semiotic machinery. Escaping from anaesthesia requires the ability to see (and feel) people for what distinguishes them from everybody else—what makes them *anomalous*.

What Michael doesn't realize is that seeing things this way is a choice. After he wakes up from his nightmare, he has breakfast with Lisa while they make plans for a life together. But as their conversation progresses, Lisa's mannerisms (talking with her mouth full, clicking her teeth against her fork, etc.) begin to get on Michael's nerves. To to his horror, Lisa's voice begins to change, and soon her lines, too, are delivered by Tom Noonan. As Michael realizes what is happening, the camera slowly realigns itself with his point of view. In the foreground, the back of Michael's head fills half the frame, while Lisa evaporates in the background due to shallow focus and the blinding light of the sun behind her (Fig. 8). Crowded and divided into distinct spatial planes, the composition of this shot directly contrasts the deep-focused wide shots of the sex scene, which at once gave Michael and Lisa a bit of space and allowed them to share it. As soon as Michael begins to notice Lisa's less appealing differences, the camera slips right back into his head. For an anaesthetized solipsist, happiness, too, is fugitive.

In the following scene, Michael gives his (anti)climactic customer-service speech. In the wake of Lisa's assimilation into the homogeneity of his mind, Michael lays out a set of guidelines for empathy: "Remember that everyone has a body," he says halfheartedly, "Each body has aches." But Michael repeatedly begins to speak extemporaneously about how difficult it is for him to follow these rules. "What is it to ache?" he asks. "What is it to be alive? I don't know. I don't know." In counterpoint to his tender moment of physical contact with Lisa (and perhaps *because* of its rapid dissolution), Michael abruptly describes his emotional state as "need[ing] tears" to "tear [him] in two and let this nightmare escape," saying that it's "like not being able to come." His unambiguous description of his emotional state as *not productive* (an inability to cry or come) and *not pain* (he doesn't know "what it is to ache") further emphasize the "nonfeltness" of his affective anaesthesia, while his vivid assertion of the need for physical

catharsis via sex or violence underscores the accumulated frustration of his senselessness. The film cuts away from his speech before he can finish.

*

As Lisa's bad table manners transform her into "everyone else" before Michael's eyes, she optimistically reflects on the new direction her life seems to be taking: "Things can work out," she says. "That's the lesson." Michael, who seems to have already made up his mind to leave her, avoids eye contact and suggests that "sometimes there's no lesson. That's a lesson in itself." Michael may not have learned anything from his encounter with Lisa, but his inability to do so illustrates the stakes of the discourse connecting cognitive and bodily affective phenomena. Michael's anaesthesia emphasizes the importance of "links" between physiological and psychological processes, theorized as "function-meaning interloops" by Massumi[38] and as a "sensory circuit" by Buck-Morss.[39] Whereas *Inside Out* relies on structural and architectural metaphors to depict a cognitive "headquarters" distinct from Riley's body, these images of "loops" and "circuits" imply a continual and reciprocal interaction between mental and corporeal processes that challenges "interest motivator" affect theories in which emotions "drive" an ancillary and mechanized body. By literalizing and foregrounding this mechanization through its metacinematic use of stop-motion puppetry, *Anomalisa* illustrates the consequences of a life lived in the head, far from the sensory boundaries that constitute the first step in the process of generating affect. As a result, Michael is anaesthetic, a-sensory, and the oppressive homogeneity of his perceptions is transposed onto the world around him through the film's meticulous control of the malleable animated mise en scène.

[38] *PV*, 25.

[39] "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics," 12.

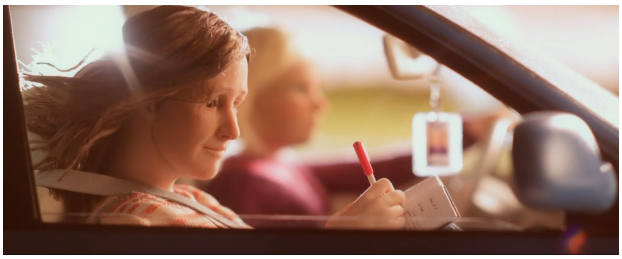



Fig. 9: Lisa, homogenized in Michael's perception, and **Fig. 10:** Lisa at the end of the film.

In the sense that *Anomalisa*'s thesis about the relationship between embodiment and fulfilling affect goes beyond Michael's ability to take a "lesson" away from his brief connection with Lisa, the film presents a cautionary tale about the effects of an imbalance between mind and body—between head and heart, per Massumi's formulation. In its final moments, the film offers a brief glimpse beyond the ambiguous perspective that has slipped in and out of Michael's mind for almost ninety minutes. Leaving his hypothetical life with Lisa in Cincinnati, Michael goes home to his unhappy, identical family. He sits at the bottom of the stairs in his house after an argument with his wife, and the camera pulls away as he stares ahead with an expression of resigned aporia. In a more traditionally structured narrative, the film would fade to black, emphasizing the tragedy of Michael's inability to change. Instead, *Anomalisa* offers a coda: Lisa rides back home in her friend's convertible, writing in her journal. And though she was thoroughly homogenized in Michael's perception by the time he gave his speech (fig. 9), in the film's final shot her face and voice are her own. The wind blows back her hair, revealing the scar that she self-consciously covers with her bangs throughout the film, and she looks ahead with an expression of contentment (fig. 10). Though Michael is himself unable to recognize and overcome his affective shortcomings, his momentary and perhaps ill-intentioned effort to start an affair with Lisa at least gives her the physical positivity and self-worth she needs to look forward to the rest of her life again. "I'm sorry to see you go," she writes, "but I understand. Well, I don't understand, but I accept it."

*

If, in *Being John Malkovich*, the "sum total" of puppet-Abelard's love consists of the "wretched pleasures" he takes in his lustful thoughts of Heloise, Michael Stone's assimilation and objectification of everyone he meets represents a different kind of "wretched pleasure": not a feverish longing for an absent love, but a selfish erasure of difference, a refusal to see people for anything other than their capacity to please him. And just as puppet-Heloise's "thoughts are betrayed by the movement of [her] body," the foregrounded objectification of the film's puppet bodies "betrays" Michael's thoughts in two senses of the word. For one thing, it *exposes* his solipsistic treatment of everyone around him by functioning as a metaphor for his limited and selfish perception. But the film's bodies also *conflict* with his efforts to grapple with his "insensible" emotional state, as literal diegetic objects that exacerbate his isolation.

Through its slippages between subjective and objective points of view, its visual and narrative motifs of "spreading thin," and its foregrounding of the themes of aporia and corporeality, *Anomalisa* creates a narrative and textual "feeling" that eludes its protagonist's apprehension. Through its use of stop-motion to deindividuate and mechanize the bodies of its characters, the film foregrounds the link between corporeal and cognitive processes in generating affect, affirming recent theoretical imperatives to think of affect as a mingling of mind and body. *Inside Out* illustrated the necessity of pliable and continually adapting strategies, but stopped short of engaging with the cinematographic ambiguities required to depict affect as a co-constitutive physiological and psychological phenomenon. Strident in its diegetic blends and blurs, *Anomalisa* takes on this challenge, illustrating the importance of sensory engagement in generating affect through the cautionary tale of a man who fails to strike the proper balance between mind and body. In my final chapter, I'll show how Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away*

complicates the theoretical imperative to think corporeally by demonstrating the adverse effects of received aesthetic values that condition our cognitive assessment of bodily experiences.

*

An Encyclopedia of Embodiment: *Spirited Away*'s Aesthetic-Affective Paradigm Shift

At the 2003 Academy Awards, Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away* beat out four films produced by Disney and Dreamworks to win the Oscar for Best Animated Feature. After nearly three decades of making complex, feminist, environmentally conscious films, Miyazaki exploded into the western cinematic imagination, earning a lucrative Disney distribution deal with DVD introductions from Disney "Chief Creative Officer" John Lasseter. But *Spirited Away* perplexed western audiences; in the wake of the "Disney Renaissance" that produced sumptuous traditionalist films like *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *The Lion King*, where was the place for this lush yet terrifying film about a girl whose parents are transformed into pigs onscreen, about a masked, translucent ghost who eats people and steals their voices?[1] Some were quick to identify an allegory for human trafficking: a young girl is forced to work in a bathhouse, losing her name in the process—pretty straightforward. But where did such a grown-up "cartoon" fit in? In his 2002 review for *Salon*, Andrew O'Hehir wrote that "to those who want to ask practical questions, such as whether 'Spirited Away' is an appropriate movie for children, I have no answers. Arguably it isn't an appropriate movie for anybody."[2]

But despite *Spirited Away*'s apparent challenges to the genre codification of the American box-office, Miyazaki's films tend to function according to the same realist principles that helped Disney corner the market. That is to say that he essentially uses the frame as a

[1] A brief anecdotal indulgence: Just about everyone I know who saw this film for the first time around the age of six remembers stopping about fifteen minutes in because this sequence was so frightening. Many of them, myself included, steered clear of Miyazaki's films for years because of the visceral horror of watching Chihiro's parents transformed and taken away from her.

[2] Andrew O'Hehir. "Spirited Away." *Salon*. September 25, 2002. http://www.salon.com/2002/09/25/spirited.

camera lens; while the *contents* of the frame are often otherworldly and fantastical, "plasmaticness," the forcing of "representational forms to behave as a non-volitional play of free lines and surfaces,"[3] is limited—the film's laws of physics are clear and consistent.

As I discussed in my chapter on *Inside Out*, much has been made of Disney's decision to forgo animation's more abstract capacities in favor of approximating live-action visual storytelling. Paul Wells writes that although the *Silly Symphonies* series and Mickey cartoons were often characterized by the "rubber hose" aesthetic of early animation, Disney sensed that in order to fully legitimize the medium it would be necessary to adopt the grammar of mainstream cinema. "In moving towards the imperatives of live action and populist utopianism of his narratives," he writes, "[Disney] was responding to what he believed was a perceived need in an audience and in the commercial context in which he wished to make his films."[4] This meant moving toward the feature-length format with *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) and developing a house style that would come to be known as "plausible impossibility": animators created fantastical images (a flying elephant: impossible) that nevertheless followed strict internal rules (he has to flap his ears: plausible).[5]

The cinematographic principle of Disney's films bears heavily, if somewhat obliquely, on Japanese animation's visual paradigm. The *anime* style coalesced during a process of market consolidation with striking similarities to the industrialization of American animation under Disney and his competitors. While in the 1930s the Disney and Fleischer studios adopted a Fordist assembly-line model of animation that simultaneously fractured and collectivized the

---

[3] Eisenstein, *ED*, 99.

[4] Wells, *AA*, 39.

[5] Walt Disney. "The Plausible Impossible" [*Disneyland* episode]. Directed by William Beaudine and Wilfred Jackson. (1956; Burbank, CA: Disney Home Video, 2001), DVD.

process of making films, the Japanese government began to commission propaganda cartoons to bolster morale during the early days of the Fifteen Years' War. "In 1941," writes animation historian Marco Pellitteri, "the Propaganda Department [...] consolidated [small animation companies] into larger corporations, which resulted in the coordination of production" and laid the groundwork for the development of what would become an enormous industry.[6] The films produced in this era, many of which were lost in the aftermath of the war, frequently contained thematic and stylistic responses to American cartoons, by that time already world-famous and nearly universally recognizable; a 1930 film called *Sky Eagles*, for example features an aerial battle in which Japanese pilots shoot at clouds shaped like Popeye the Sailor and enemy planes flown by conspicuously round-eared mice.[7]

The consolidation and assimilation of Japan's animation industry was further solidified under strict American oversight during the military occupation following the Second World War. Jonathan Clements argues that "several animators in the post-war period successfully carried the skills and know-how of the animators of the Fifteen Years War through the lean times of the Occupation, in order to create a firm base of talent and labor."[8] The financial hardships of these "lean times" were coupled with the influence of an occupying force with a vested interest in promoting a positive image of American culture. Clements describes one director's decision to insert a sequence featuring a dancing Pinocchio into an otherwise naturalistic film, suggesting "a deliberate attempt to ingratiate the animators to the American censors."[9] The *anime* industry

[6] Marco Pellitteri and Lisa Maya Quaianni Manuzzato, "Japan," in *Animation: A World History*, ed. Giannalberto Bendazzi (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2016): 180.

[7] Jonathan Clements, *Anime: A History* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013): 56.

[8] Ibid., 74.

[9] Ibid., 76.

developed its signature visual style during this time, in large part due to the influence of animator and manga artist Osamu Tezuka, whose enormously popular *Astro Boy* series (1952-68) placed joint stylistic and economic demands on his competitors. Rayna Denison argues that Tezuka's cost-saving "limited animation" model and his tendency to sell individual *Astro Boy* episodes for less than their production cost (in hopes of making a profit on merchandise) made it necessary for other animators and studios to adopt similar methods and, consequently, a similar style.[10]

This visual style, in which Hayao Miyazaki was trained and in which he has worked for the last half-century, blends the Disney style's diegetic principle of "plausible impossibility" with Japanese cultural sensibilities as well as a heightened emphasis on photorealistic verisimilitude. Crucially, *anime* tends to operate with similarly restricted levels of plasmaticness and cartoonal play. Magical creatures abound, body proportions and facial expressions are exaggerated and distorted, and characters can fly, but everything in the frame essentially obeys a common set of physical laws. So rather than using animation for its abstract expressionist capacity, Miyazaki's *modus operandi* since his 1983 sci-fi eco-parable *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* has been to use the medium to tell stories that live action cannot—like a battle between warring drought-stricken tribes and hordes of enormous Argus-eyed insects—and to do so as realistically as possible. By 2002, Miyazaki had already noted the encroachment of CGI into his mode of storytelling; asked about that year's *Spider-Man*, he told Roger Ebert that "in a way now, live action is becoming part of that whole soup called animation [...] and my animation is just a little tiny dot over in the corner."[11] If the recent string of live-action/CG hybrid remakes of

[10] Rayna Denison, *Anime: A Critical Introduction* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015): 79-80.

[11] Roger Ebert. "Hayao Miyazaki Interview." *Roger Ebert*. September 12, 2002. http://www.rogerebert.com/interviews/hayao-miyazaki-interview.

classic animated films (*The Jungle Book*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Ghost in the Shell*) is any indication, studios have caught on to this trend.

All of this is to say that *Spirited Away* occupies the intersection of several artistic and commercial impulses. And just as its grown-up themes and frightening visuals challenge the genre classification system in part established by its own Disney realist paradigm, *Spirited Away*'s narrative of personal empowerment in the face of overwhelming threat and physical ugliness subverts the traditional aesthetic paradigms that presuppose a link between the two; that is, between ugliness and threat. For if, as I argued in my last chapter, animation links sensation, affect, and cognition through aesthetic slippages between subjective experience and quasi-objective mise en scène, *Spirited Away*'s narrative of aesthetic encounters contextualizes such slippages as part of a received—and changeable—system of ethical and corporeal values. The links between Chihiro's initial frightened paralysis and her sensory confrontations with (and interpretations of) the bodies she encounters throughout the film show how Miyazaki provides an alternative to exclusionary aesthetic principles predicated on a rejecting the body, paving the way for a more inclusive system based on shared materiality and mutual vulnerability.

To illustrate Chihiro's aesthetic paradigm shift, I'll begin by showing how Miyazaki uses the basic tools of cinema to link her point of view (and emotional state) with her external circumstances and sensory encounters. With this in mind, Chihiro's terrified inactivity arises from her aesthetic "readings" of the grotesquely rendered bodies at Yubaba's bathhouse, whose "ugly" corporeal excesses initially signify evil and threat—a reaction in line with centuries of aesthetic theory on the topic of disgust. Through analyses of the film's major set pieces—encounters with Kamaji, the "stink spirit," and No-Face—I'll show how, by reclaiming her

agency through work (which more often than not requires physical contact with these bodies), Chihiro leaves exclusion behind and develops a celebratory aesthetic paradigm.

*

Like *Anomalisa*, *Spirited Away*'s visual style capitalizes on animation's slippages between subjective and objective points of view, necessitating a hybrid interpretive strategy for reading the bodies in the film. On the one hand, Miyazaki's essentially photorealist mode foregrounds his use of traditional cinematographic techniques like blocking, character performances, and camera movement as affective and narratological tools. *Spirited Away*'s opening image, a first-person close-up of a bouquet of flowers and a goodbye card from Chihiro's friends, is one of a handful of explicitly perspectival images that punctuate the film. These moments, few and far between, serve the dual purpose of anchoring the film's largely third-person diegesis in the subjective experiences of its protagonist and foregrounding the fact that she, too, has to make sense of the unfamiliar and dreamlike forms she encounters. So while Miyazaki opts almost exclusively for an "outside-in" mode of storytelling, these periodic reminders of Chihiro's point of view indicate a space within his realist system for questions of interpretation and aesthetic evaluation. All of this would be possible in any live-action film.

On the other hand, viewers must also keep close by the principle that nothing in an animated film draws itself—every image necessitates artistic decisions. *Qua* animation, this means that we have to pay attention to everything that Miyazaki does and does not include in the frame, and *how*. These questions are particularly pertinent when it comes to character design; from the start of the film, Miyazaki subtly develops a visual system linking intricate detail (particularly lighting) with feelings of fear and disgust. When Chihiro and her parents stumble upon an abandoned amusement park after taking a wrong turn on the way to their new house,

they follow their noses to a food stand with enormous, mysteriously abundant plates of steaming food. Despite Chihiro's reservations, her parents begin to piles plates with fat, shiny dumplings, plump birds and other pieces of meat; "Daddy's got credit cards and cash," her father explains through a mouthful of food. The shot is composed as a medium close-up of Chihiro's parents sitting beneath the restaurant counter's awning, lit from behind as they devour the greasy food that glistens on their plates (fig. 1). The detailed lighting in the foreground, which emphasizes the curves and protuberances of her parents' bodies, contrasts with the simpler, flatter lighting on Chihiro in the background.

Miyazaki's variable commitment to detail, a visual mode I'm calling "selective photorealism" becomes a consistent strategy throughout the film, not only for drawing the eye to important characters, but also for highlighting their corporeality. When, despite Chihiro's protests, her parents continue shoveling food into their mouths, unsettling changes begin to occur: the sun starts to set as a cloud of steam fills the enclosed stall, further emphasizing the contrast of the low incandescent lights. Chihiro urges her parents to leave, but they only hunch further over their food as their mastications grow louder and fleshier. Other stalls and buildings turn on their electric lights, and shadows begin to move around the edges of the frame. Chihiro finally approaches her parents, now surrounded by piles of reddish-brown food waste, to physically pull them away from the restaurant. But when her father turns to face her, Chihiro lets out a scream: he has transformed into an enormous pig. By this time, the lighting effect from the beginning of the scene has intensified; Chihiro's pig-parents' bodies bulge irregularly with ripples of flesh, clothes pulled taut with strain to contain their lumpy, shimmering skin (fig. 2).


Fig. 1: Chihiro watches her parents eat, and **Fig. 2:** Chihiro's parents, transformed into pigs

The images of overflowing flesh and waste in this sequence evoke Mikhail Bakhtin's formulation of the grotesque, whose "artistic logic [...] ignores the closed, smooth, and impenetrable surface of the body and retains only its excrescences (sprouts, buds) and orifices, only that which leads beyond the body's limited space or into the body's depths."[12] Whereas Chihiro's gangly limbs and oversized clothes emphasize her smallness and fragility, making her an essentially malleable and plastic element of the frame (see, for example, the way her parents crowd her into the middle third of the frame in figure 1), her parents' bodies spill outward, transgressing their limits to reach "beyond [their] limited space." Miyazaki's use of selective photorealism in this sequence highlights Chihiro's parents' grotesque bodies as both sources and objects of revulsion. Their lumpy, filmy glow, which contrasts with the smooth aesthetics of Chihiro's simpler design, might be interpreted as either the sensory stimulus that provokes her disgust or a slightly exaggerated depiction of her *perception* of her parents. In the same way that *Anomalisa*'s bland hotel hallways and taxicabs could be read as both reflective and constitutive of Michael Stone's heady anaesthesia, the sticky-looking lighting on Chihiro's pig-parents is both a representation of and a catalyst for her fright.

Chihiro's parents' transformation illustrates the way Miyazaki explores the extremes of character design; like the selective detail in their transformation into pigs, every visual element

[12] Bakhtin, *RW*, 317.

of an animated body is a deliberate representational choice. Chihiro will encounter a great number of bodies during her time at the bathhouse (a collection of bouncing yellow-green heads, a coterie of ducks who wear leaves as hats, etc.), enormously diverse in their shapes, sizes, colors and levels of anthropomorphism—and in their accordance with traditional notions of physical beauty. And though Chihiro gradually learns how to reconcile these "ugly" external forms their complex and benevolent interiority, her initial encounters are purely sensory. In a way, Chihiro's default interpretive strategy evokes Eugenie Brinkema's "radical formalist" approach for gleaning affect from images, a method that involves "de-privileging models of expressivity" by de-coupling external formal qualities from ideas of interiority.[13] Reading the grotesque corporeal surfaces of the frogs, ducks, and other spirits she meets, Chihiro interprets the "formal structures" of their bodies as signifying evil and threat.

Chihiro's affective response to the aesthetic encounters at the beginning of the film is a frightened paralysis, a disruption of her agency (in this case, her ability to even move) that isolates her from the film's growing cast of characters, even as the creatures demonstrate a generosity that contradicts Chihiro's misreading of their bodies. After her parents' transformation, Chihiro flees, sprinting back in the direction of the car but finding herself instead at the bank of an impossibly wide river. Lost without her parents and terrified by the strange and indeterminate creatures she saw at the amusement park, Chihiro freezes in place and curls into the fetal position. This gesture, a way of minimizing the vulnerable physical surface of her body area, is Chihiro's first line of defense against the overwhelming stimuli of the Spirit World.

[13] Brinkema, *FA*, 37. Although I do want to acknowledge that there's a difference between Chihiro's surface *mis*reading and Brinkema's deliberate departure from an affect model linked to interiority. Brinkema's rejection of "expression" reveals her commitment to a model of affect not dependent on a cognitively-enabled subject.

"It's just a dream, it's just a dream," she says, pounding her forehead with her palms. But to no avail: as she rocks back and forth, her body becomes translucent, revealing the flagstone path beneath her feet. Then, frightened by the approach of a riverboat filled with hooded spirits, she flees to hide behind a building, rubbing her hands together in an attempt to preserve her materiality. As she sinks to the floor, a young man in traditional Japanese robes approaches. Placing his hands on her vanishing shoulders (fig. 3), he implores her to eat a small red bean, sternly telling Chihiro "you have to eat some food from this world, or else you'll disappear." She swallows the bean, and gradually her body becomes opaque again. But when she tries to stand, she finds that she can't move her legs. Haku, the boy who's come to help her, quickly casts a spell to bring her back to her feet and leads her to the bathhouse where she must take residence for survival.


Fig. 3: Haku comforts a vanishing Chihiro, and **Fig. 4:** Kamaji, the bathhouse's six-armed boilerman

Chihiro's near-disappearance foregrounds both the importance of embodiment in the film's narrative logic and the centrality of Chihiro's own materiality to her subjective feelings of security and comfort. Though her first instinct in the presence of danger is to modulate the boundaries of her physical interaction with the world by making herself as small as possible, the threat of completely losing her concrete physical interface sends Chihiro into a panic. It's only through the act of physical consumption that she is able to ground herself at the material level and experience a brief moment of relief: "I'm okay," she says as she presses her fingertips

against Haku's palm. As with *Anomalisa*'s Michael Stone and *Inside Out*'s Riley, Chihiro's physical needs—to eat, to touch—bring her down to earth from the whirling head-space of anxiety and panic.

If affect is essentially, as Rei Terada describes it, "the interpretation of predicaments," Chihiro's incapacitated response to her frightening new circumstances reveals a link between her interpretive strategies and her ability to *do something* about her situation.[14] Chihiro's circumscribed agency, her terrified immobility and passivity in the face of overwhelming circumstances and stimuli, evokes Spinoza's formulation of *affectus*: Chihiro's limited "*potentia agendi*," or "capacity to act," reflects the simultaneous sensory and cognitive impacts of her arrival in the Spirit World.[15] Her paralysis is both a physical and an emotional state.

If this paralysis can thus be conceived as a "feeling" in the sense that it is both a sensory and cognitive response to Chihiro's interaction with the world, it undoubtedly qualifies, per Ngai, as an *ugly* feeling. Certainly negative in its close connection with ugliness and physical threat, Chihiro's paralysis also exemplifies the crucial quality of unproductiveness, in the sense that fear prevents her from *working*.[16] Just as Michael Stone's solipsistic "anaesthesia" impeded his much-needed emotional (and physical) catharsis, Chihiro's inability to take action at the start of the film inhibits both her physical safety, dependent on her ability to make herself useful at the bathhouse, and her emotional well-being, dependent on connection with the other characters in the film. When Haku first arrives and attempts to help Chihiro by giving her the red bean, she initially shuts her eyes and attempts to shove him away—only to press her evanescent arms

[14] Rei Terada, *Feeling in Theory: Emotion After the "Death of the Subject"* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 57.

[15] Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, vol. III, definition 3.

[16] Ngai, *UF*, 2.

straight through his body. Most of Chihiro's interactions with new characters play out in much the same manner: scared to respond, she only speaks when her silence provokes outward frustration (in the case of Yubaba, the macrocephalic witch who owns the bathhouse) or pity (in the case of Lin, a persnickety but kindhearted employee who takes Chihiro on as an apprentice).

But paralysis is anathema to the demands of the bathhouse, where constant physical labor—often requiring close proximity to or contact with the Spirit World's myriad bodies—is the sole condition of Chihiro's residency. Like Chihiro's run-ins with her pig-parents and the shadowy spirits in the amusement park, each unique body in the film presents an aesthetic encounter. The extraordinary sensory characteristics (shape, texture, sound, smell) of these creatures highlight the dual sense of "aesthetics" undergirding Chihiro's affective responses: as pertaining to the subjective *affectus* of Chihiro's beleaguered sensorium, but also to the received system of beauty-related moral judgments that structure her interpretation of the world; the latter here designated "categorical aesthetics" as a way of keeping the two straight.

Chihiro's paralysis grows out of a traditional aesthetic system predicated on a body-mind moral hierarchy that codifies the exclusion of intolerable corporeality as *disgust*. As a relay point between the fields of affect and aesthetics, disgust reveals the links between our sensory experiences and the evaluative structures that inflect our affective responses—and illustrates how subjective "interpretations of predicaments" might reflect broader collective priorities. Writing at the dawn of the affective turn, William Ian Miller begins his 1997 *Anatomy of Disgust* with a focus on individual experience: "[Emotions] give the world its peculiarly animated quality; they make it a source of fear, joy, outrage, disgust, and delight. They can also de-animate the world by making it a cause for boredom and despair."[17] Whereas Spinoza's formulation of affect as the

[17] William Ian Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 8. Hereafter *AD*.

"changing potential to act" emphasizes the body as the passive object of interactions with the world, Miller makes emotions the grammatical subject. They "animate" the world, structuring our perceptions through the outward projection of subjective dispositions, as in the case of *Inside Out*'s color-coded memory orbs. And while Spinoza's and Miller's directional disagreement may appear to set them at odds,[18] it also reveals the interplay (and occasional competition) between impulses that condition our understanding of the world—sensory and categorical aesthetics.

As Chihiro illustrates, the fear of sensory interaction is central to Miller's formulation of disgust, which he says "evokes the sensory experience of what it feels like to be put in danger by the disgusting, of what it feels like to be too close to it, to have to smell it, see it, or touch it."[19]But he also describes disgust's social and evaluative qualities, identifying "disgust rules" that "proclaim the meanness and inferiority of [their] subject[s]."[20] Brinkema contextualizes Miller's emphasis on the role of abjection—literally the "throwing away" of the intolerable—as part of a centuries-long philosophical effort to "moderate pleasure through the notion of an unlimited or infinite reflection."[21] Fearing moral and material excesses (and accepting the implicit premise that there is a connection between the two), aesthetic theorists celebrated the high-minded pleasures of thought, in hopes of mediating direct corporeal experience through reason and classification. Both Brinkema and Ngai note the paradoxical necessity of disgust, an "unintegratable aspect" of the structure of aesthetic valuation that nevertheless accompanies the

[18] Indeed, this disagreement may be the affect theory's most fundamental split; as Gregg and Seigworth see it "there is [...] a certain sense of reverse flow between these lines of inquiry—a certain inside-out/outside-in difference in directionality: affect as the prime "interest" motivator that comes to put the drive in bodily drives (Tomkins); affect as an entire, vital, and modulating field of myriad becomings across human and nonhuman (Deleuze)." See Gregg and Seigworth, "An Inventory of Shimmers," 6.

[19] Miller, *AD*, 9.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Brinkema, *FA*, 125.

idea of "beauty" wherever it goes.[22] Brinkema further problematizes this not-ness, arguing that disgust is "a floating signifier of rejection [...] into which anything can be placed to disappear into the ravenous hunger of cultural prohibition."[23] Brinkema's deconstruction reveals disgust to be an unstable theoretical strategy for preserving a circumscribed notion of "beauty" by tempering sensory engagement with the world and vilifying forms which fail to do so.

Though the perspectives of the aesthetic philosophers Brinkema problematizes are decidedly eurocentric, their formulations of the relationship between otherness and the senses are certainly borne out in Chihiro's particular disgust. As I discussed in the context of Chihiro's parents' transformation, her fear, disgust, and paralysis are both represented and intensified by Miyazaki's selective photorealist principle. As the film progresses, a few key interactions demonstrate the porousness of the boundary between horror, revulsion, and the inability to act. These sensory and categorical aesthetic encounters illustrate the tensions outlined by Miller, Ngai, and Brinkema in the context of Chihiro's struggle to reclaim her agency and connect with the characters around her. While the scope and danger of these encounters appear to increase sequentially, each scene has essentially the same structure: Chihiro is initially frightened into paralysis, is forced to take action, and finally realizes that she had never been in all that much danger in the first place. Still, her bravery in the face of what she *perceives* as threatening circumstances repeatedly expands her capacity to take on the challenges of her work in the bathhouse. By reshaping her paralysis through action, Chihiro develops a more positive *potentia agendi* and re-codes her aesthetic priorities—a paradigm-shift that allows her to remove ugliness from the equation and finally connect with the film's other characters.

[22] Ibid., 126.

[23] Ibid., 132.

Kamaji, the bathhouse's disgruntled, six-armed boilerman, is the first of these encounters. After Haku helps Chihiro regain her material body, he instructs her to find the boiler-room and ask its operator for work. "If you don't get a job," he tells her, "Yubaba will turn you into an animal." Though initially hesitant and frightened at the prospect of being left alone, Chihiro eventually follows Haku's instructions and makes her way to Kamaji. Perched on a wooden platform at the center of the room and working away with all six of his arms, the boilerman seems not to notice Chihiro as she enters the room. Lit in the same lumpy and highly detailed manner as Chihiro's parents, Kamaji's spiderlike body, spindly and irregular, demonstrates a kind of grotesque excess that differs from their overconsumption (fig. 4). His six gangly arms, unsightly "ramifications and offshoots," flaunt the standard confines of a human body and allow him to stretch out in all directions at once.[24] They twist, bend, and stretch without any apparent muscular or skeletal constraints—one of the only examples of outright "plasmaticness" in the film. When Chihiro sees him at work, she shrinks unseen into the corner of the room; eyes half-closed, hair disheveled, and with a hand over her stomach, her gestural response is somewhere between horror and illness.

Kamaji's stretchy, expanding form, a callback to an older era of animation, illustrates how the medium's malleable commitment to physical laws allows filmmakers to foreground the boundaries of the body. Describing Gertrude, the similarly boneless wife of *Infinite Jest*'s Québecois wheelchair-assassin Marathe, Heather Houser writes that "disgust is a powerful strategy for making bodies physical even as it foregrounds the indeterminacy of the body's limits and thus threatens the self."[25] But whereas the inherent vulnerability of Gertrude's concave, plasmatic body threatens her own survival (the narrator likens her head to "a half-filled balloon

[24] Bakhtin, *RW*, 26.

[25] Houser, *Ecosickness*, 157.

or empty bag"), Kamaji's excessive (literally "out-stepping") rubber-hose indeterminacy is a threat to Chihiro's safety—at least, that's how *she* interprets it.[26]

Like the skeleton-hand bramble that grabs at the hem of Snow White's dress as she runs through the woods, Kamaji's eerily flexible arms represent an isolated disruption of the text's internal physical laws, foregrounding not only his own fluid corporeal boundaries but also the potential instability of the entire animated world. Borrowing a name from the ecstatic early films of Winsor McCay, Scott Bukatman calls the universe of cartoons a "slumberland [...] a space of play and plasmatic possibility" characterized by formal fluidity and "playful disobedience."[27] At the turn of the 20th century, when animation was still so young a medium that part of the spectacle was disbelief that drawings could move in the first place, cartoon characters were "disobedient machines," spirited and self-possessed, but always in the context of their fabrication by the animator.[28]

But while the Spirit World may qualify as an animated "slumberland" in the sense that it is populated by exaggerated, metamorphic, and dreamlike forms, Miyazaki's storytelling strategies endow Chihiro with a sense of subjectivity absent from the films of McCay—this is why she is afraid of such seemingly harmless creatures as the Ootori-Sama, a group of giant yellow ducks who sometimes wear leaves as hats, and the Radish Spirit, an enormous anthropomorphized daikon with whom Chihiro shares an elevator to meet Yubaba (fig. 5). Whereas the whimsical cartoon physics of McCay's films "depend on an understanding of actual physics and a conscious decision to 'play along' with a world that operates differently," the Spirit World is altogether unconcerned with Chihiro's understanding of or willingness to follow

[26] David Foster Wallace, *Infinite Jest* (New York, NY: Back Bay Books, 1996), 778.

[27] Bukatman, *The Poetics of Slumberland*, 2.

[28] Ibid., 6.

the rules.[29] When Chihiro strikes her palms against her head and says "I'm dreaming, I'm dreaming," she doesn't wake up.


Fig. 5: The Radish Spirit, and **Fig. 6:** Chihiro "smells like a human"

If the Spirit World exemplifies the possibilities of animation without the playful cartoonality traditionally associated with the medium, it also lacks the aesthetic consensus that informs Chihiro's initial reactions to the bodies she encounters. In her analysis of the social-evaluative dimension that undergirds ugliness judgments, Ngai amplifies Miller's emphasis on disgust's exclusionary "rules," arguing that "[disgust] seeks to include or draw others *into* its exclusion of its object, enabling a strange kind of sociability."[30] Trapped in a new place without the social bonds of a shared aesthetic paradigm, the ugly underpinnings of Chihiro's body-reading strategy are laid bare—and in fact, she herself becomes the object of revulsion for the bathhouse's spirits. As Haku leads Chihiro to the side entrance of the bathhouse, a panic breaks out when one character, Yubaba's frog henchman, hears her breath. Throughout the film, the new characters Chihiro meets repeatedly complain that she "smells like a human," and she is routinely relegated to the most onerous and humiliating tasks in the bathhouse (fig. 6). Indeed, if disgust is characterized by "a hungry demand for rules of inclusion and exclusion," the

[29] Ibid., 14.

[30] Ngai, *UF*, 336.

inhabitants of the Spirit World place Chihiro squarely outside their established notions of beauty and acceptability.[31]

But it is precisely because of Chihiro's repositioning as the excluded "other" in the Spirit World that she is forced to reclaim her agency and rethink her paradigm for interpreting bodies. Susan Napier gives Chihiro's alienness to the bathhouse an ecocritical dimension, arguing that "Chihiro herself is initially signified as a polluting alien marked by her human stench but gradually she becomes incorporated into the bathhouse collectivity, where she grows in agency and maturity."[32] Napier's emphasis on pollution and collectivity underscores her interpretation of the film as an exploration of consumption and cultural exchange. For Napier, the specter of global capital looms at the edges of *Spirited Away* like a masked ghost: while "much of the extraordinary visual pleasure of the film comes from [its] [European-Chinese-Japanese] amalgam of diverse motifs and images," the ideology of consumerism as embodied in the film's various grotesque monsters illustrates a "primitive territoriality" in our relations with one another and with the planet.[33] The selfish fixation on satisfying immediate physical desires (most often for food, but also for wealth) without heed to their larger consequences creates "polluted" bodies.

Clearly, Napier's suspicion of the pleasures of global capitalist consumption complicates my own attempt to problematize aesthetic theories that link moral and physical excesses. While on the one hand the insistent materiality of the Spirit World's inhabitants challenges the "disgust rules" of Chihiro's body-interpretation strategy, the film's sociocultural and ecocritical agendas seems in some part to depend on them. After all, shouldn't we abhor the needless, epicurean

---

[31] Brinkema, *FA*, 130.

[32] Susan Napier, "Matter Out of Place: Carnival, Containment, and Cultural Recovery in Miyazaki's *Spirited Away*," in *Journal of Japanese Studies* 32.2 (Summer 2006), 290.

[33] Ibid.

overconsumption that transforms Chihiro's parents into pigs? Shouldn't we treat such disregard for moderation with some degree of revulsion?

Perhaps not. Two of *Spirited Away*'s bodies—those of the "stink spirit" and No-Face—demonstrate the destructive sublimation of harshly codified aesthetic principles that rely on disgust and shame. In both of these encounters, Chihiro's equanimity and compassion in the face of grotesque excess create new avenues for reconciling "ugly" materiality with moderation and positive affect. In this way, Chihiro develops an aesthetic system that simultaneously highlights our duty to peer and planet and represents excess without codifying grotesque bodies as inherently immoral.

Such an outlook depends, essentially, on a reclamation of the grotesque for its positive critical productivity. In Brinkema's deconstruction of traditional aesthetic systems' disgust rules, she argues that "the affect is a structure organized around a process of exclusion and not a content that fills it in or gives it definition, shape, coherence, substance."[34] Brinkema emphasizes disgust's essentially negative quality (that is, its *not*-ness), asserting its inability to be integrated into any aesthetic structure "but a set of itemized disgusting things": vomit, excess flesh, bodily fluids, *et cetera*.[35] This characterization of disgust as essentially non-constructive illustrates the problem with aesthetic rules that vilify bad bodily behavior without providing a positive, materialist alternative. Thus, in Ngai's view, "a poetics of disgust would seem incompatible with pluralism."[36] She critiques not just its exclusionary and non-structuring qualities, but also its

[34] Brinkema, *FA*, 129.

[35] Ibid., 130.

[36] Ngai, *UF*, 345.

essentially non-*celebratory* nature. Disgust, then, presupposes a "correct" way to have a body by demarcating "the negative limit of [aesthetic] disattendability."[37]

Chihiro's first customer at the bathhouse, an enormous mass of green-brown sludge called "the stink spirit," pushes this negative limit (fig. 7). As it approaches the bathhouse, the amusement park's spirits shutter their storefronts and turn out the lights. Yubaba's employees attempt to ward it off by waving lanterns and shouting that the bathhouse is closed, but they faint or flee as soon as they're able to smell the spirit. The stink spirit's repulsiveness is apparently so powerful that it permeates the medium itself. When it gives Chihiro a handful of slimy gold coins in exchange for a soak in "the big tub," her hair literally stands on end as a chill passes through her body—a zig-zag pattern that ruffles her drawn outline from bottom to top as her eyes expand and her muscles tense up. As *Inside Out*'s visual shorthand shows, these kinds of literalized metaphors are well-treaded ground for animation, a medium defined by the transposition of internal feeling onto bodies' external forms. But as in the case of Kamaji's rubber-hose arms, the infrequency of such slippages into a cartoonal mode makes Chihiro's initial reaction to the stink spirit even more remarkable. The stink spirit's medium-infecting repulsion illustrates Brinkema's argument that disgust "seems to be [...] an affect bound up with bodies, to implant itself without mediation on a skin or a consciousness, to have a direct target in the repulsed sensorium of its victim."[38] Brinkema's emphasis on the power of unmediated sensory experience recalls the aesthetic overload that feeds into Chihiro's paralysis earlier in the film—the agency-sapping fear that pushes her into diegetic interstices, into corners, into the fetal position.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Brinkema, *FA*, 134.

Spilling outwards and leaving a trail of brown sludge wherever it goes, the stink spirit's body literally exceeds its own boundaries, recalling Houser's and Bakhtin's emphases on "indeterminacies" which "lead beyond the body's limited space." But as horrid as the stink spirit may be, Chihiro gradually learns (as do all of the bathhouse's employees, who watch from the balcony) that its grotesque sensory characteristics have little to do with its nature. Overcoming the paralyzing force of her disgust, Chihiro wades through the now knee-deep, semi-solid slime to pull the lever that will fill the tub with mineral-infused water. Knocked into the tub by the stream, Chihiro spots a metal rod sticking out of the side of the spirit's body, which she pulls out with the help of Yubaba's magic. The rod, it turns out, is the handle of an old, rusted bicycle, the first object in a tangled, impossibly large mass of garbage that sprays out into the bathhouse atrium, dirtying everything in sight. The so-called "stink spirit," Yubaba explains, was actually a polluted river spirit—and he is still in the bathhouse. After Chihiro discovers a small brown dumpling as her reward,[39] an incredibly wrinkled mask emerges from the water, bidding Chihiro "Well done!" before disappearing from the bathhouse in a shimmering dragon-like jet, triumphant laughter echoing in its wake (fig. 8).

The narrative trajectory of the stink spirit sequence demonstrates how sensory interaction through reclaimed agency enables Chihiro to rethink her disgust parameters and engage more positively with materiality. *Immersion* is a key motif for the relations between bodies in this scene, as Chihiro's literal plunge into the polluted material of the river spirit's body illustrates a metaphorical "diving in" to an unprecedented level of sensory engagement and body consciousness. Whereas in previous scenes Chihiro froze and shrunk within the frame, allowing herself to become a malleable element of the mise en scène in exchange for minimized physical interaction, here she deliberately enters a space of unmediated physical contact, submerging

[39] "Dumpling" is Napier's excellent descriptor. But, really, your guess is as good as mine.

herself in the sludge, the bathwater, the grey-brown cascade of consumer waste. When the sound of the river spirit's laughter fades, the entire bathhouse erupts in applause.

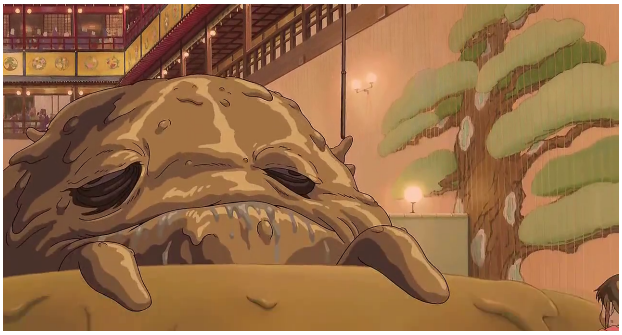



Fig. 7: The Stink Spirit, and **Fig. 8:** The River Spirit

As a marker of Chihiro's bravery as well as her acceptance into the bathhouse, the stink spirit sequence is obviously a landmark in her personal journey. But the spirit's transformation—particularly its emphasis on the motif of pollution—also has the effect of decoupling physical excesses from moral culpability (the river spirit is not to blame for its own pollution), illustrating the way that outside forces can simultaneously condition a body's form and its reception. Napier rightly points out the implied causes of the river spirit's transformation into the grotesque monster that arrives at the bathhouse: "Despoiled by modern civilization," she writes, "the river has become a sacrifice to consumer capitalism."[40] Napier's passive construction, which puts the river spirit's body at the mercy of diffused sociocultural evils, illustrates the destructive power of ethical systems predicated on negativity and exclusion. The torrents of garbage that emerge from the river spirit's body are presumably the result of decades of "out of sight, out of mind" thinking: it is easier to hide waste beneath the surface of a river than to confront it. Just as Michael Stone projects his homogenizing anaesthesia onto Lisa—to the detriment of both of them—the stink spirit represents a sublimation of the shame and negativity associated with material excess. In this way, the spirit's shapeless, ever-expanding body is a testament to the

[40] Napier, "Matter Out of Place," 303.

failure of traditional aesthetic systems to structure disattendable forms and behaviors as part of a positive dialogue. Made "insistent and intolerable" by continual neglect, the chickens have come home to roost.[41]

*

If the stink spirit's revolting appearance tests the utility of a disgust-based poetics by making that which "the aesthetic cannot speak" unignorable, Chihiro's actions pave the way for a more compassionate, mindful, and, crucially, *realistic* approach to the body.[42] Elsewhere I have made much of Miyazaki's visual principle of selective photorealism, arguing that his deliberate variation in levels of detail allows him to use the mise en scène to simultaneously *represent* and *generate* affect. But Chihiro's interaction with the stink spirit prompts an expansion of that concept of "realism" to account for the underlying aesthetic principles that *motivate* representational decisions. For, as I explored in my first chapter, animation complicates the dichotomy between competing notions of "realism" by necessitating visual compromises between truth to *form* and truth to *feeling*.

And while part of what makes animation so amenable to affect theory in the first place is their shared resistance to "dialectical reconciliation of cleanly oppositional elements," (i.e., animation can and probably always is true to both form *and* feeling), thinking in terms of compromises can provide useful, if not rigid, strategies for approaching individual texts.[43] Bakhtin exemplifies this somewhat loose theoretical mode in *Rabelais and His World*, where he argues that grotesque corporeal imagery, while differing from the "naturalist picture of the

[41] Ngai, *UF*, 333.

[42] Brinkema, *FA*, 126.

[43] Gregg and Seigworth, "An Inventory of Shimmers," 4.

human body," is nevertheless a fundamentally realist style.[44] Just as Miyazaki modulates realism through selective inclusion of detail, Bakhtin's realism is characterized by "exaggeration, hyperbolism, [and] excessiveness."[45] Critiquing scholars who previously defined the grotesque as the exaggeration of solely inappropriate (or "disattendable," to use Miller's term) bodily forms and functions, he offers the merry, "carnivalesque" world of Rabelais as an example of the grotesque body's capacity to "degrade"[46] lofty, cognitivist aesthetic systems "to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity."[47] Like the stink spirit's insistent, all-out assault on the senses, the realism of Bakhtin's theory lies in his assertion of the need to incorporate ugly forms into an inclusive poetics of the body, rather than execrating them as an inarticulable transcendental signified.

Crucially, Bakhtin writes that "in grotesque realism, the bodily element is deeply positive."[48] Whereas traditional disgust poetics rely on a fear of sensory engagement, Bakhtin writes that "the [grotesque] images of folk culture are absolutely fearless and communicate this fearlessness to all."[49] Chihiro achieves this fearlessness, antithetical to her paralysis, only through immersive sensory confrontation with an Other she initially codifies as disgusting and threatening. In this way, Bakhtin offers a corrective to the limited and decidedly *un*realistic disgust-poetics problematized by Brinkema and Ngai—as well as a personal, affective alternative for Chihiro. All of this focus on "positivity" is not to say that the film conceives of the stink

[44] Bakhtin, *RW*, 315.

[45] Ibid., 303.

[46] From Latin *de-gradior*, literally "to step down." See "degrade, v." *OED Online*. December 2016. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/view/Entry/49100.

[47] Ibid., 21, 19-20.

[48] Ibid., 19.

[49] Bakhtin, *RW*, 39.

spirit's overwhelming and excretory form as "a good thing"; rather, such a paradigm-shift emphasizes the both the *critically* positive dimensions of an essentially inclusive, materialist conception of difference (as opposed to the negative "notness" of theories linking excess and disgust). If *Inside Out* demonstrates how animation instantiates Massumi's "vertical path between the head and the heart," and *Anomalisa* shows the dangers of an improper balance between the two, *Spirited Away* offers a safeguard against paths and strategies that lead back up into the head.[50] Following Chihiro's model, this essentially amounts to a deliberate, moment-by-moment decision to engage with and interpret bodies generously.

In the case of the polluted and misunderstood river spirit, this generosity essentially amounted to a willingness to read beyond the coded body-interpretation laid out by the exclusive aesthetics of disgust. Chihiro's physical contact with the spirit's excessive body revealed its underlying goodness, highlighting the destructive potential for *mis*reading bodies that accompanies a resolute linkage of moral and physical excess. But her next challenge, a masked, translucent spirit named No-Face, complicates the enterprise of interpretation writ-large. Initially devoid of corporeal qualification, No-Face's body—and his actions—transform to reflect the way that other characters treat him. In this way, he comes to embody the bathhouse's rampant consumption; and as in the case of the stink spirit, it is Chihiro's willingness to take action that brings about No-Face's eventual redemptive transformation.

No-Face first appears toward the beginning of the film, lurking in the dark outside the bathhouse as Chihiro becomes acclimated to her new environment. Unfamiliar with the aesthetic conventions of the Spirit World, Chihiro does not distinguish him from the other strange and unfamiliar bodies she encounters. When she first sees him, crossing a bridge on her way to meet Haku at the bathhouse's pigpen (where her parents are being kept), Chihiro bows her head

[50] Massumi, *PV*, 25.

slightly and avoids interaction—though No-Face certainly sees *her* (fig. 9). But when she musters the courage to turn around, the bridge is deserted.

Translucent and apparently eager to disappear, No-Face is a literal "fugitive presence," an embodiment of the unnerving "illegibility" that Ngai identifies in Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener."[51] In the opening reading of her theory of "ugly feelings," she identifies how "the interpretive problems posed by [Bartleby's] *affective* equivocality" themselves become "sites of emotional negativity."[52] But whereas Bartleby's withholding of labor begs the question, "What, if anything, is this inexpressive character *feeling*," No-Face prompts a truncated version: What, if anything, *is* this inexpressive character?[53]

For one thing, his physical characteristics align fortuitously with the terms Brinkema and Ngai use to problematize exclusionary aesthetic systems: lingering at the periphery of the bathhouse like a vampire without an invitation, No-Face, like disgust itself, is "a floating signifier of rejection, not-ness, exclusion."[54] But this isn't to say that No-Face is ostracized on the same excess-abhorring terms as the stink spirit; rather, as a "signifier of not-ness," No-Face doesn't fit into a traditional aesthetic system because of his sheer lack of qualification. But as the film progresses, it becomes clear that No-Face's lack of qualities is depends upon his exclusion from social interaction. When Chihiro leaves a sliding door open as an offer of respite from a thunderstorm, No-Face becomes set on reciprocating her act of generosity. He follows her around, repeatedly offering bath tokens with a slight gesture of the hands and a breathy "ah," his only method of communication in his present state.

---

[51] Ngai, *UF*, 1.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid. My italics.

[54] Brinkema, *FA*, 132.

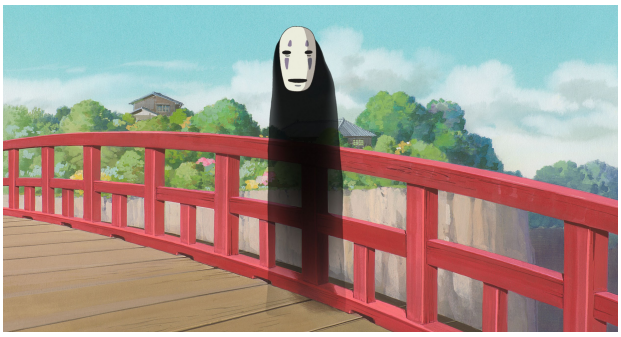



Fig. 9: No-Face when he arrives at the bathhouse **Fig. 10:** After he begins to eat

But Chihiro's busy timetable at the bathhouse prevents her from interacting with No-Face, and he quickly moves on to other, more self-interested interlocutors. While Chihiro follows an injured Haku to Yubaba's study and discovers that she has used a stolen magical charm to enslave him, No-Face finds that by handing out gold, he can earn the attention and adulation of everyone who works at the bathhouse—but he also learns from their greediness, and begins to gobble them up. With each person he swallows, No-Face's body grows new lumps, protuberances and appendages, without any apparent logical principle: pairs of skinny arms and legs, a gap-toothed mouth, a tuft of oily brown hair. Gradually his body becomes more opaque, glimmering with the detailed, fatty overflow that repeatedly demarcates disgust and horror throughout the film. The silhouettes of his victims float beneath the surface of his inky skin.

No-Face exemplifies Bakhtin's assertion that "the grotesque body [...] is a body in the act of becoming [...] it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body."[55] But his rabid and horrifying overconsumption also demonstrates how Bakhtin's body-positive aesthetics depends on more than simply the inclusion of grotesque corporeal details. By now it seems clear that *eating* is an act of enormous thematic significance in *Spirited Away*, both as an insistent reminder of corporeality and as a platform for the film's exploration of consumption and excess. After Haku takes Chihiro to see her parents at the pigpen, she shrinks, as usual, into the

[55] Bakhtin, *RW*, 317

protective fetal position against a hedgerow. She doesn't respond to Haku's words of encouragement, but when she takes a bite of the rice cakes he offers her, she begins to cry enormous, stylized tears, before breaking down into sobs. Her first productive and essentially outward show of emotion since her arrival in the Spirit World, the moment is clearly a minor catharsis for Chihiro. Her spirits are immediately lifted in the cut to the next scene, as she bows to Haku and thanks him for his assistance.

Chihiro's reliance on food as a catalyst for productive emotion and interpersonal connection contrasts with the "primitive territoriality" that characterizes other characters' relationship to eating. In No-Face's case, eating comes to illustrate a perverse reciprocity in his interactions with the self-interested residents of the bathhouse; as various spirits bring plates of food to No-Face in hopes of receiving a handful of gold, he reflects not their "generosity" but instead their greed—by eating them. If the stink spirit revealed the unignorable consequences of consumptive excess and shame, No-Face materializes and amplifies the ugly not-ness of traditional aesthetic discourses and embodies the ultimate obstacle to Bakhtin's celebratory paradigm.

As is typical of Miyazaki's narratives, defeating this final obstacle does not require a vanquishing of No-Face himself but rather of the unpleasant drives and impulses that motivate him to violence.[56] If No-Face's appearance and actions are a reflection of his treatment at the hands of others, Chihiro's real enemy is thus her own disgust (and that of the others at the bathhouse, for whom she sets an example). Having accepted a quest to visit Yubaba's sister and apologize in person for the theft of the magical trinket that enslaves Haku, Chihiro returns to the ground floor of the bathhouse to find No-Face—by this point a gigantic, six-legged, bean-shaped blob. Hundreds of spirits have lined up with elaborately decorated meals, in hopes of receiving

[56] See also *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1983), *Princess Mononoke* (1997), *Ponyo* (2008).

handfuls of gold. But as soon as No-Face learns of Chihiro's presence, he waddles over to her, drooling, and offers her some of the spirits' food—an enormous bowl full of whole, skinned rabbits—as well as some gold. "I'm not giving it to anybody else," he says in the voice of one of his swallowed victims.

Chihiro responds with equanimity: "I'd like to leave, please. I have someplace I need to be. You should go home, too. Don't you have a place to go?" No-Face's mask shrinks into his purple-black ripples of flesh as he responds, "No. I'm lonely. I'm lonely." In response to No-Face's growing agitation, Chihiro tosses the river spirit's medicine into his mouth before fleeing to the train station to follow through on her quest. No-Face convulses and retches as his body reacts to the dumpling, and he barrels after Chihiro as she runs away, vomiting up food, slime, and intact bathhouse patrons as he gradually reverts to his original form.

Chihiro's refusal to react to No-Face's grotesque body is itself a positive act, a gesture of empathy and generous interpretation that disconnects the aesthetic feedback loop at the root of his monstrous form. By "degrading" compassion to the level of the senses (making it material instead of purely cognitive), Chihiro demonstrates the "absolutely fearless" quality of Bakhtin's material bodily principle, creating the conditions for the moderated and celebratory system of body aesthetics that characterizes the rest of the film.[57]

If No-Face's first transformation demonstrated his inability to resolve an isolating negative affect as the excluded "floater signifier" of a problematic poetics of disgust, his reversion following Chihiro's rejection of disgust shows how her aesthetic paradigm-shift presents the possibility for healing and renewal. In this sense, he reveals what Bakhtin sees as the stakes of grotesque realism, which he asserts is "not a private, egotistic form," but rather a

[57] Bakhtin, *RW*, 39.

collective celebration of the people.[58] Chihiro's dissolution of her own isolating paralysis through engagement at the level of the senses enables her to interact compassionately with others, illustrating Bakhtin's idea that "the grotesque body is not separated from the rest of the world. It is not a closed, completed unit."[59] If insistently material bodies are not "closed, completed units" in the sense that they exist in constant give-and-take with the outside world, they are also not affective closed *circuits*, in the sense that materiality and sensory engagement are prerequisites for productive empathic connection with beings beyond the self.

For if *Inside Out* shows how animation elides the "vertical path between head and heart" through categorical systems of visual metaphor, and *Anomalisa* reveals the complications of perspectival solipsism as represented by the wholly plastic animated mise en scène, *Spirited Away* provides a set of guidelines for the interpretation of otherness in a way that prioritizes materiality as the basis for positive affect. Whereas Michael Stone's flash-in-the-pan connection fizzled out because he never made a choice to see others as unique and meaningfully differentiated, Chihiro's empathic connection depends on a moment-by-moment decision as a good thing—and to moderate consumption by engaging with its underlying causes rather than simply vilifying its physical consequences.

*

[58] Bakhtin, *RW*, 19.

[59] Ibid., 26.

Conclusion:
Emotions Can't Quit, Genius!

Two years ago, I sat down in Donna Kornhaber's office to ask her why she thought Adam Elliot's *Brother* (1999) had (and continues to have) such a powerful emotional impact. A simple, memoiristic reflection on loss told entirely through colorless and nearly static claymation tableaus, *Brother* affects me in a way that I have not yet found the words to describe. Sadness, longing, nostalgia? None of the words were quite right, and I wanted to know *why*. This film, the first twenty minutes of Pixar's *Up* (2009), the entirety of Isao Takahata's *Grave of the Fireflies* (1988)—why did they all have a mysterious ability to bypass my affective defense mechanisms and cut to the bone? Donna suggested that *Brother*'s emphasis on minute bodily details—a candy store owner's varicose veins, the narrator's brother's bad eye, their father's paralyzed legs—kept it grounded, mundane, close to the viewer's own corporeal peculiarities (figs. 1-2).

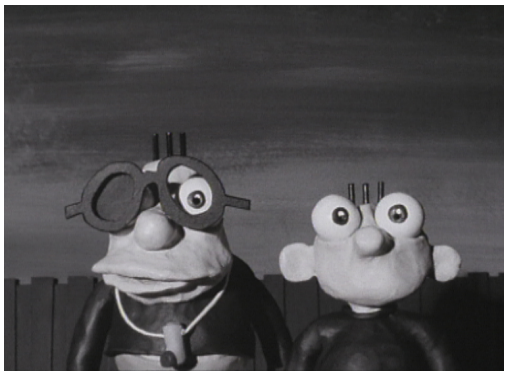


Fig. 1: *Brother's* narrator and his sibling, **Fig. 2:** His father

This is part of what animation is all about, she told me. You get to stretch things out, exaggerate, direct the viewer's eye. Animators negotiate "reality" to visualize how things feel—in a way that *enriches* rather than *complicates* the concomitant notion of how things "are." The question I asked her that day was the motivating impulse that gradually evolved into this thesis. No matter how many films I watch, books I read, or journal entries I write, the intuitive

emotional impact of animation only grows more elusive. I carry images with me, every minute of every day: a well-behaved No-Face cuts into a slice of cake at the end of *Spirited Away* (fig. 3). Two translucent stick-figures ponder a non-figurative skyscape in Don Hertzfeldt's *World of Tomorrow* (2015) (fig. 4). I wanted, from the outset, to include these stills in the body of my argument. But frankly, I still do not know exactly what it is that they do to me.

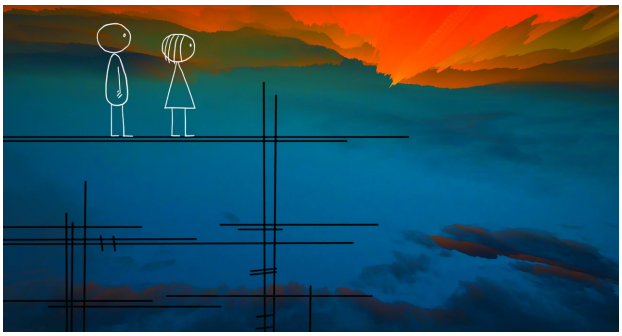


Fig. 3: No-Face politely eats a slice of sponge cake **Fig. 4:** Hertzfeldt's *World of Tomorrow*

Isn't this why we write, why we watch films, why we get up in the morning? To try and discover what animates us? Around midway through *Inside Out*, Fear packs a suitcase and attempts to escape Riley's head through the pneumatic tube that inhales color-coded memory orbs into the machinery of her mind—with Joy and Sadness gone, Riley's life has become impossible to keep under control. But when the tube activates, Fear finds that it has no effect; it pulls at his clothes, but he remains firmly in place at the bottom of the tube. As he looks around in disbelief, Disgust rolls her eyes. "Emotions can't *quit*, genius," she says. Fear falls out of the tube and walks diffidently back to the control panel.

I'm charmed by the notion that a team of emotions sits at a metaphorical control panel in my head, pulling levers and turning gears in an effort to make my life as joyful as possible. I like the idea of emotion's *autonomy*, but that word—like so many others in scholarship on affect—fills a very different place in the conversation than one might think. For Massumi, affect's "autonomy" refers to its independence from the cognitive systems we use to understand the

world and ourselves; by this paradigm, he argues that affect and emotion "follow different logics and pertain to different orders."[1] Certainly there are affective phenomena that we can categorize and apprehend with language: Joy, Sadness, Anger, Fear and Disgust, for example. But what ultimately makes affect "autonomous" is its refusal to be confined to totalizing linguistic systems. Massumi's is just one perspective, of course. But his boisterous and at times flagrantly imprecise mode of theorizing at the very least underscores how the more slippery elements of the affective relationship between mind and body can undermine claims to theoretical solidity. Over time, theorists have learned to make peace with and even thrive amidst the "ever-processual" flow of affect's inherent ambiguities.[2] Animation and affect search for concepts and forms that work in similar ways, particularly in their efforts to work out the tangled questions of embodiment and subjectivity, and the role they have in generating emotion.

This thesis argues that animation and affect fulfill each other's needs: animation's search for a vocabulary that valorizes its unique relation to flux, metamorphosis, the shifting boundary between subject and world; affect's demand for forms that resist structural fixities, that flutter freely between conceptual and representational systems. The animated films I've explored here also raise stakes for our own lives, pointing the way to positive affect through narratives of personal and emotional crisis. These issues, like so many others in animation studies and affect theory, converge at the relationship between the body and the mind.

In the introduction, I argued that animation and affect "resonate" in their shared resistance to structural fixities, be they formal or theoretical. The complete representational freedom afforded by animation's plasmatic mise en scène requires filmmakers to strike deliberate balances between mimesis and abstraction, circumscribing their depictive capacity in

[1] Massumi, *PV*, 27.

[2] Gregg and Seigworth, "An Inventory of Shimmers," 9.

the name of thematic or narrative cohesion. This imperative to adopt visual constraints aligns animation with the deliberately tentative methodology that characterizes the writings of a number of affect theorists, who mindfully embrace loose critical strategies as a way of engaging with questions that defy clean categorical breakdowns. In this sense, animation and affect also share a fascination with the permeable boundary between internal and external realities.

Pixar's *Inside Out* literalizes what Paul Wells terms an "oscillation" between these interior and exterior states, visualizing the relationship between body and mind through a crisp and meticulously organized system of visual metaphors. Through both its color-coded character design and its motifs of architecture and industry, *Inside Out* exemplifies the way that animation's imperative for stylistic compromise allows filmmakers to engage with challenging subjects. And though the film initially appears to shy away from its own shortcomings through dysphemistic depictions of forms and concepts that challenge its visual strategy (as well as its cognitivist theory of affect), its narrative resolution ultimately arises from a moment of structural malleability. In this way, the film makes a pragmatic case for the acts of deliberate circumscription that both animation and affect necessitate.

Charlie Kaufman and Duke Johnson's *Anomalisa* problematizes the depictive and theoretical ambiguities that *Inside Out* gestures toward but ultimately fails to address. Through its use of trick cinematography to blend first- and third-person perspectives, the film opts for an approach that does not hinge on a clear distinction between "inside" and "out" but rather renders them co-constitutive. The film's obscure diegetic commitment results in a mise en scène that is at once representative and constitutive of its protagonist's interior state: the world of *Anomalisa* is both a metaphor for and a contributing factor to its protagonist's "insensible" emotions. By emphasizing the objectifying and mechanizing effects of stop-motion animation within the

context of the film's ambiguous diegesis, Kaufman and Johnson call attention to the role of the senses in generating and constituting affect. Ultimately, the film presents a cautionary tale of the negative consequences of an affective "circuit" that strikes an improper balance between sensory and cognitive processes.

Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away* illustrates how the affects and judgments that emerge from such mind-body circuits are informed by a received system of aesthetic priorities that codifies excessive, "grotesque" bodies as signifiers of disgust. Through strategies that subtly align the diegesis with its protagonist's subjective perception and call attention to the physical peculiarities of its characters, the film highlights the acts of bodily interpretation that undergird our affective responses to physical circumstances. Though Chihiro initially perceives the unfamiliar and transgressive bodies around her as threatening, through sensory engagement she gradually adopts a new paradigm predicated on a more positive view of "grotesque" materiality. In this way, the film critiques the traditional exclusionary poetics of disgust as a paradigm that requires and creates ugliness and disgust, and offers up through Chihiro a more generous system of aesthetic values.

Taken together, these films demonstrate the robustness of animation's capacity to engage with questions of cognition, subjectivity and embodiment, across its enormous diversity of styles and techniques. Recognizing the homologies between animation's representational fluidity and affect theory's demand for flexible methodologies enriches both conversations, giving artists and theorists alike a new vocabulary for understanding the relationship between what we think and what we feel.

But what's more, through their formal and narrative features, they articulate a paradigm that allows theorists and viewers alike to reconsider where "feelings" come from and how we

ought to engage with them. *Inside Out*, *Anomalisa* and *Spirited Away* make crystal clear the necessity of being present, not just in our thoughts and intentions, but in every place where our bodies intermingle with the world around us. *Inside Out* encourages us not to sweat the details, not to expect or strive for perfection, so long as we're able to adapt to the challenges of the present moment and move forward. *Anomalisa* highlights the need to balance the circuit of mind and body—to engage with others attentively, with an eye toward the details that make them anomalous. And *Spirited Away* sets an example of the kindness, generosity and courage it takes to approach life this way.

In both animation's potential for radical change and affect theory's emphasis on what Gregg and Seigworth term "style[s] of being present," I have long perceived an imperative to live in the moment. For all of the structural and methodological similarities between these disciplines, they also share a "blink and you'll miss it" quality, an emphasis on the temporal flow from moment to moment that carries us onward, ever onward. This thesis has been an attempt to slip into that flow, into the nowness of the body's interactions with the world.

The tools we have developed to understand and represent these interactions—cinema, theory, everything else—have helped us to discover, in Michael Stone's words, "what it is to be alive, what it is to be human." And though some of us, like Lisa, are capable of "not understanding, but accepting" the workings of the world, our understanding of the relationship between embodiment and subjectivity and emotion is far from complete. In what has become a kind of refrain throughout affect theory, Spinoza writes that "no one has yet determined what the body can do."[3] Affect, for the originator of the term, is ultimately a question of *potential*: to act, to change the world, to move forward. This thesis has aimed to provide scholars with the tools to do just that. Because emotions can't quit, and neither can we.

[3] Spinoza, *Ethics*, vol. III, definition 2.

Bibliography

"aesthetic, n. and adj." *OED Online*. December 2016. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/3237.

Arnould-Bloomfield, Elisabeth. "Posthuman Compassions." In *PMLA* 130.5 (October 2015): 1467-75.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*, tr. Helene Iswolsky. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1968 [1965].

Beckman, Karen, ed. *Animating Film Theory*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014.

Bolter, Jay David and Richard Grusin. *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998.

Brinkema, Eugenie. *The Forms of the Affects*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014.

Buck-Morss, Susan. "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered." In *October* 62 (Autumn 1992): 3-41.

Bukatman, Scott. *The Poetics of Slumberland: Animated Spirits and the Animating Spirit.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012.

Catmull, Ed. "Inside the Pixar Braintrust." *Fast Company.* March 12, 2014. https://www.fastcompany.com/3027135/lessons-learned/inside-the-pixar-braintrust.

Clements, Jonathan. *Anime: A History* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013).

Darwin, Charles. *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals.* In *From so Simple a Beginning: The Four Great Books of Charles Darwin*, ed. Edward O. Wilson, 1255-1477. New York: W. W. Norton: 2006.

"degrade, v." *OED Online*. December 2016. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/view/Entry/49100.

Denison, Rayna. *Anime: A Critical Introduction* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

Diamond in the Rough: The Making of Aladdin [*Aladdin* Platinum Edition, Disc 2]. Burbank, CA: Disney Home Video, 2004. DVD.

Disney, Walt. "The Plausible Impossible" [*Disneyland* episode]. Directed by William Beaudine and Wilfred Jackson. 1956. Burbank, CA: Disney Home Video, 2001. DVD.

Ebert, Roger. "Hayao Miyazaki Interview." *Roger Ebert*. September 12, 2002. http://www.rogerebert.com/interviews/hayao-miyazaki-interview.

———. “The Polar Express.” *Roger Ebert*. November 9, 2004. http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/the-polar-express-2004.

Eisenstein, Sergei. *Eisenstein on Disney*, ed. Jay Leyda. London: Heinemann, 1989.

Ekman, Paul. “A Case for Basic Emotions,” in *Cognition and Emotion* 6.3 (1992): 169-200.

———. *Emotion in the Human Face*. Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1972.

———. “Paul Ekman on Silvan Tomkins and Facial Expression.” *The Tomkins Institute*. http://www.tomkins.org/what-tomkins-said/what-others-said-about-tomkins/paul-ekman-on-silvan-tomkins-and-facial-expression.

Eliot, Marc. *Walt Disney: Hollywood’s Dark Prince* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1994).

“emotion, n.” *OED Online*. December 2016. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/61249.

Furniss, Maureen. *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics* (London: John Libbey, 1998).

Gagné, Michel. “Taste Visualization for Pixar’s *Ratatouille*.” *Gagne International*. 2007. http://www.gagneint.com/Final%20site/Animation/Pixar/Ratatouille.htm.

Gregg, Melissa and Gregory J. Seigworth, eds. *The Affect Theory Reader*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010.

Grusin, Richard. “Radical Mediation.” In *Critical Inquiry* 42.1 (Autumn 2015), 124-48.

Heise, Ursula. “Plasmatic Nature: Environmentalism and Animated Film.” In *Public Culture* 26.2 (Spring 2014): 301-18.

Houser, Heather. *Ecosickness in Contemporary U.S. Fiction: Environment and Affect*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014.

Joyce, James. *Ulysses.* New York: Vintage, 1934 [1922].

Kaufman, Charlie and Tim Gray. “‘Anomalisa’: The Big Challenges of Re-Creating Life on a Small Scale.” *Variety*. December 30, 2015. https://variety.com/2015/artisans/news/anomalisa-small-scale-challenges-1201664471.

Keltner, Dacher and Paul Ekman. “The Science of *Inside Out*.” *The New York Times*. July 3, 2015. https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/05/opinion/sunday/the-science-of-inside-out.html.

Lee, Wendy Anne. “The Scandal of Insensibility; or, The Bartleby Problem.” In *PMLA* 130.5 (October 2015): 1405-19.

Massumi, Brian. *Parables for the Virtual*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002.

Miller, William Ian. *The Anatomy of Disgust*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998.

Moritz, William. “Fischinger at Disney, or Oskar in the Mousetrap.” In *Millimeter Magazine* (February 1977): 25-28, 65-67.

Mossner, Alexa Weik von, ed. *Moving Environments: Affect, Emotion, Ecology, and Film.* Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2014.

Napier, Susan. “Matter Out of Place: Carnival, Containment, and Cultural Recovery in Miyazaki’s *Spirited Away*.” In *Journal of Japanese Studies* 32.2 (Summer 2006): 287-310.

Ngai, Sianne. *Ugly Feelings*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007.

O’Hehir, Andrew. “Spirited Away.” *Salon*. September 25, 2002. http://www.salon.com/2002/09/25/spirited.

Pellitteri, Marco and Lisa Maya Quaianni Manuzzato, “Japan,” in *Animation: A World History*, ed. Giannalberto Bendazzi (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2016).

Riffel, Casey. “Dissecting *Bambi*: Multiplanar Photography, the Cel Technique, and the Flowering of Full Animation.” In *The Velvet Light Trap* 69 (Spring 2012): 3-16.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosovsky. *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003.

Shouse, Eric. “Feeling, Emotion, Affect.” In *M/C Journal* 8.6 (2005).

Spinoza, Baruch. *The Ethics*, tr. R. H. M. Elwes. Illinois: Project Gutenberg, 2009. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3800/3800-h/3800-h.htm.

Terada, Rei. *Feeling in Theory: Emotion After the “Death of the Subject.”* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003.

Thomas, Frank and Ollie Johnston. *The Illusion of Life: Disney Animation* (New York: Abbeville, 1981).

Tomkins, Silvan S. *Affect Imagery Consciousness*, 4 vols. New York: Springer, 1962-92.

———. “Inverse Archaeology: Facial Affect and the Interfaces of Scripts Within and Between Persons,” in *Exploring Affect* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 285.

Travers, Peter. “The Polar Express.” *Rolling Stone*. November 18, 2004. http://www.rollingstone.com/movies/reviews/the-polar-express-20041118.

Wallace, David Foster. *Infinite Jest*. New York: Back Bay Books, 1996.

Wells, Paul. *Animation and America*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002.

———. *Animation: Genre and Authorship*. London: Wallflower, 2002.

Filmography

Adaptation (2002)
Aladdin (1992)
Anomalisa (2015)
Astro Boy (1952-68)
Being John Malkovich (1999)
Bimbo's Initiation (1931)
Brother (1999)
Castle in the Sky (1986)
Der Fuehrer's Face (1942)
Duck Amuck (1953)
Dumbo (1941)
Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (2004)
Eye Myth (1967)
Finding Nemo (2003)
Finding Dory (2016)
Food (1992)
Fuji (1974)
Grave of the Fireflies (1988)
Inside Out (2015)
Monsters, Inc. (2001)
Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind (1983)
The Old Mill (1937)
Only Yesterday (1991)
The Polar Express (2004)
Ponyo (2008)
Princess Mononoke (1997)
Ratatouille (2007)
Skeleton Dance, The (1929)
Sky Eagles (1930)
Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937)
Steamboat Willie (1928)
Spirited Away (2001)
Synecdoche, New York (2008)
The Tale of the Princess Kaguya (2013)
Toot, Whistle, Plunk and Boom (1953)
Toy Story (1995)
Up (2009)
World of Tomorrow (2015)

Biography

Dylan Davidson is a reader, writer, cartoon enthusiast and aspiring academic. He is animated by a love of movies, dogs, critical theory, theatre and experimental fiction. After graduating, Dylan intends to read widely for a while before pursuing graduate education in literary and cinema studies. He hopes to help people breathe.